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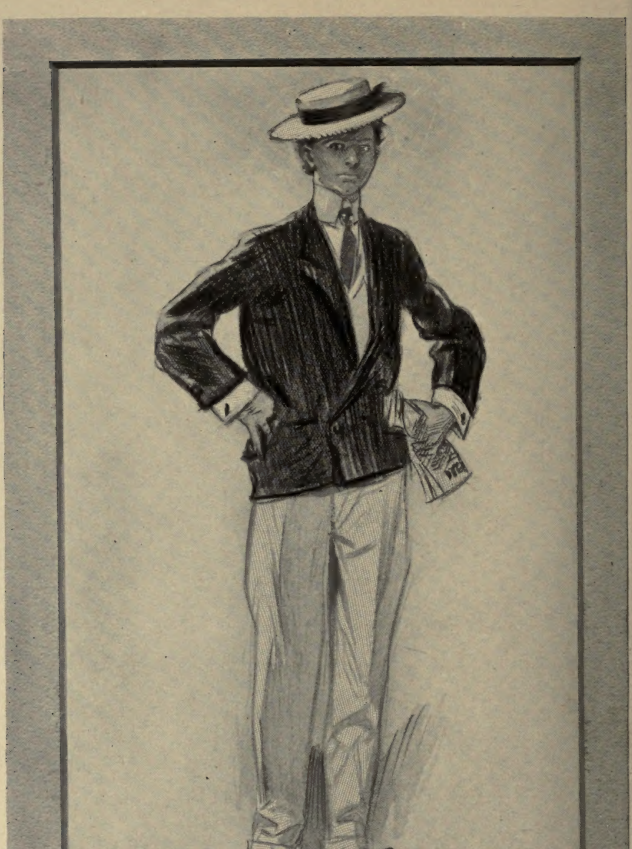
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IN OUR TOWN

OTHER BOOKS
BY WILLIAM ALLEN WHITE



The Court of Boyville, The Real Issue, Stratagems and Spoils



He wore his collars so high that he had to order them from a drummer

In Our Town

BY

WILLIAM ALLEN WHITE



Illustrations by F. R. Gruger and W. Glackens

NEW YORK
McCLURE, PHILLIPS & CO.
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He wore his collars so high that he had to order them from a cripple

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In Our Town

BY

WILLIAM ALLEN WHITE



Illustrations by F. R. Gruger and W. Glackens

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NEW YORK
McCLURE, PHILLIPS & CO.
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IN OUR TOWN

I

Scribes and Pharisees

OURS is a little town in that part of the country called the West by those who live east of the Alleghanies, and referred to lovingly as " back East " by those who dwell west of the Rockies. It is a country town where, as the song goes, " you know everybody and they all know you," and the country newspaper office is the social clearing-house.

When a man has published a paper in a country community for many years, he knows his town and its people, their strength and their weakness, their joys and their sorrows, their failings and their prosperity—or if he does not know these things, he is on the road to failure, for this knowledge must be the spirit of his paper. The country editor and his reporters sooner or later pass upon everything that interests their town.

In our little newspaper office we are all reporters, and we know many intimate things

about our people that we do not print. We know, for instance, which wives will not let their husbands endorse other men's notes at the banks. We know about the row the Baptists are having to get rid of the bass singer in their choir, who has sung at funerals for thirty years, until it has reached a point where all good Baptists dread death on account of his lugubrious profundo. Perhaps we should take this tragedy to heart, but we know that the Methodists are having the same trouble with their soprano, who " flats "— and has flatted for ten years, and is too proud to quit the choir " under fire " as she calls it; and we remember what a time the Congregationalists had getting rid of their tenor. So that choir troubles are to us only a part of the grist that keeps the mill going.

As the merest incident of the daily grind, it came to the office that the bank cashier, whose retirement we announced with half a column of regret, was caught $3500 short, after twenty years of faithful service, and that his wife sold the homestead to make his shortage good. We know the week that the widower sets out, and we hear with remarkable accuracy just when he

has been refused by this particular widow or that, and, when he begins on a school-teacher, the whole office has candy and cigar and mince pie bets on the result, with the odds on the widower five to one. We know the woman who is always sent for when a baby comes to town, and who has laid more good people of the community in their shrouds than all the undertakers. We know the politician who gets five dollars a day for his " services " at the polls, the man who takes three dollars and the man who will work for the good of the cause in the precious hope of a blessed reward at some future county convention. To know these things is not a matter of pride; it is not a source of annoyance or shame; it is part of the business.

Though our loathed but esteemed contemporary, the *Statesman,* speaks of our town as " this city," and calls the marshal " chief of police," we are none the less a country town. Like hundreds of its kind, our little daily newspaper is equipped with typesetting machines and is printed from a web perfecting press, yet it is only a country newspaper, and knowing this we refuse to put on city airs. Of course we print

the afternoon Associated Press report on the first page, under formal heads and with some pretence of dignity, but that first page is the parlour of the paper, as it is of most of its contemporaries, and in the other pages they and we go around in our shirt sleeves, calling people by their first names; teasing the boys and girls good-naturedly; tickling the pompous members of the village family with straws from time to time, and letting out the family secrets of the community without much regard for the feelings of the supercilious.

Nine or ten thousand people in our town go to bed on this kind of mental pabulum, as do country-town dwellers all over the United States, and although we do not claim that it is helpful, we do contend that it does not hurt them. Certainly by poking mild fun at the shams—the town pharisees—we make it more difficult to maintain the class lines which the pretenders would establish. Possibly by printing the news of everything that happens, suppressing nothing " on account of the respectability of the parties concerned," we may prevent some evil-doers from going on with their plans, but this



Suppressing nothing "on account of the respectability of the parties concerned"

is mere conjecture, and we do not set it down to our credit. What we maintain is that in printing our little country dailies, we, the scribes, from one end of the world to the other, get more than our share of fun out of life as we go along, and pass as much of it on to our neighbours as we can spare.

Because we live in country towns, where the only car-gongs we hear are on the baker's waggon, and where the horses in the fire department work on the streets, is no reason why city dwellers should assume that we are natives. We have no dialect worth recording—save that some of us Westerners burr our "r's" a little or drop an occasional final "g." But you will find that all the things advertised in the backs of the magazines are in our houses, and that the young men in our towns walking home at midnight, with their coats over their arms, whistle the same popular airs that lovelorn boys are whistling in New York, Portland, San Francisco or New Orleans that same fine evening. Our girls are those pretty, reliant, well-dressed young women whom you see at the summer resorts from Coronado Beach to Buzzard's Bay.

In the fall and winter these girls fill the colleges of the East and the State universities of the West. Those wholesome, frank, good-natured people whom you met last winter at the Grand Cañons and who told you of the funny performance of " Uncle Tom's Cabin " in Yiddish at the People's Theatre on the East Side in New York, and insisted that you see the totem pole in Seattle; and then take a cottage for a month at Catalina Island; who gave you the tip about Abson's quaint little beefsteak chop-house up an alley in Chicago, who told you of Mrs. O'Hagan's second-hand furniture shop in Charleston, where you can get real colonial stuff dirt cheap—those people are our leading citizens, who run the bank or the dry-goods store or the flour-mill. At our annual arts and crafts show we have on exhibition loot from the four corners of the earth, and the club woman who has not heard it whispered around in our art circles that Mr. Sargent is painting too many portraits lately, and that a certain long-legged model whose face is familiar in the weekly magazines is no better than she should be—a club woman in our town who does not know of these

things is out of caste in clubdom, and women say of her that she is giving too much time to her church.

We take all the beautiful garden magazines, and our terra-cotta works are turning out creditable vases—which we pronounce "vahzes," you may be sure—for formal gardens. And though we men for the most part run our own lawn-mowers, and personally look after the work of the college boy who takes care of the horse and the cow for his room, still there are a few of us proud and haughty creatures who have automobiles, and go snorting around the country scaring horses and tooting terror into the herds by the roadside. But the bright young reporters on our papers do not let an automobile come to town without printing an item stating its make and its cost, and whether or not it is a new one or a second-hand one, and what speed it can make. At the flower parade in our own little town last October there were ten automobiles in line, decked with paper flowers and laden with pretty girls in lawns and dimities and linens—though as a matter of fact most of the linens were only "Indian head." And our particular

little country paper printed an item to the effect that the real social line of cleavage in the town lies not between the cut-glass set and the devotees of hand-painted china, but between the real nobility who wear genuine linen and the base imitations who wear Indian head.

In some towns an item like that would make people mad, but we have our people trained to stand a good deal. They know that it costs them five cents a line for cards of thanks and resolutions of respect, so they never bring them in. They know that our paper never permits "one who was there" to report social functions, so that dear old correspondent has resigned; and because we have insisted for years on making an item about the first tomatoes that are served in spring at any dinner or reception, together with the cost per pound of the tomatoes, the town has become used to our attitude and does not buzz with indignation when we poke a risible finger at the homemade costumes of the Plymouth Daughters when they present "The Mikado" to pay for the new pipe-organ. Indeed, so used is the town to our ways that when there was great talk last winter about Mrs. Frelingheysen

for serving fresh strawberries over the ice cream at her luncheon in February, just after her husband had gone through bankruptcy, she called up Miss Larrabee, our society editor, on the telephone and asked her to make a little item saying that the strawberries served by Mrs. Frelingheysen at her luncheon were not fresh, but merely sun dried. This we did gladly and printed her recipe. So used is this town to our school teachers resigning to get married that when one resigns for any other reason we make it a point to announce in the paper that it is not for the usual reason, and tell our readers exactly what the young woman is going to do.

So, gradually, without our intending to establish it, a family vernacular has grown up in the paper which our people understand, but which—like all other family vernaculars—is Greek to those outside the circle. Thus we say:

"Bill Parker is making his eighth biennial distribution of cigars to-day for a boy."

City papers would print it:

"Born to Mr. and Mrs. W. H. Parker, a baby boy."

Again we print this item:

" Mrs. Merriman is getting ready to lend her fern to the Nortons, June 15."

That doesn't mean anything, unless you happen to know that Mrs. Merriman has the prettiest Boston fern in town, and that no bow-window is properly decorated at any wedding without that fern. In larger towns the same news item would appear thus:

" Cards are out announcing the wedding of Miss Cecil Norton and Mr. Collis R. Hatcher at the home of the bride's parents, Mr. and Mrs. T. J. Norton, 1022 High street, June 15."

A plain drunk is generally referred to in our columns as a " guest of Marshal Furgeson's informal house-party," and when a group of drunk-and-disorderlies is brought in we feel free to say of their evening diversion that they " spent the happy hours, after refreshments, playing progressive hell." And this brings us to the consideration of the most important personage with whom we have to deal. In what we call " social circles," the most important personages are Mrs. Julia Neal Worthington and Mrs. Priscilla Winthrop Conklin, who keep two hired girls and can pay five dollars a week for

them when the prevailing price is three. In financial circles the most important personage is John Markley, who buys real-estate mortgages; in political circles the most important personage is Charlie Hedrick who knows the railroad attorneys at the capital and always can get passes for the county delegation to the State convention; in the railroad-yards the most important personage is the division superintendent, who smokes ten-cent cigars and has the only "room with a bath" at the Hotel Metropole. But with us, in the publication of our newspaper, the most important personage in town is Marshal Furgeson.

If you ever looked out of the car-window as you passed through town, you undoubtedly saw him at the depot, walking nervously up and down the platform, peering into the faces of strangers. He is ever on the outlook for crooks, though nothing more violent has happened in our county for years than an assault and battery. But Marshal Furgeson never relinquishes his watch. In winter, clad in his blue uniform and campaign hat, he is a familiar figure on our streets; and in summer, without coat or vest, with his big silver

star on which is stamped "Chief of Police," pinned to his suspender, he may be seen at any point where trouble is least likely to break out. He is the only man on the town site whom we are afraid to tease, because he is our chief source of news; for if we ruffle his temper he sees to it that our paper misses the details of the next chicken-raid that comes under his notice. He can bring us to time in short order.

When we particularly desire to please him we refer to him as "the authorities." If the Palace Grocery has been invaded through the back window and a box of plug tobacco stolen, Marshal Furgeson is delighted to read in the paper that "the authorities have an important clew and the arrest may be expected at any time." He is "the authorities." If "the authorities have their eyes on a certain barber-shop on South Main Street, which is supposed to be doing a back-door beer business," he again is "the authorities," and contends that the word strikes more terror into the hearts of evil-doers than the mere name, Marshal Furgeson.

Next in rank to "the authorities," in the

diplomatic corps of the office, come our advertisers: the proprietors of the White Front Dry-Goods Store, the Golden Eagle Clothing Store, and the Bee Hive. These men can come nearer to dictating the paper's policy than the bankers and politicians, who are supposed to control country newspapers. Though we are charged with being the " organ " of any of half-a-dozen politicians whom we happen to speak of kindly at various times, we have little real use for politicians in our office, and a business man who brings in sixty or seventy dollars' worth of advertising every month has more influence with us than all the politicians in the county. This is the situation in most newspaper offices that succeed, and when any other situation prevails, when politicians control editors, the newspapers don't pay well, and sooner or later the politicians are bankrupt.

The only person in town whom all the merchants desire us to poke fun at is Mail-Order Petrie. Mail-Order Petrie is a miserly old codger who buys everything out of town that he can buy a penny cheaper than the home merchants sell it. He is a hard-working man, so far

as that goes, and so stingy that he has been accused of going barefooted in the summer time to save shoes. When he is sick he sends out of town for patent medicines, and for ten years he worked in his truck-garden, fighting floods and droughts, bugs and blight, to save something like a hundred dollars, which he put in a mail-order bank in St. Louis. When it failed he grinned at the fellows who twitted him of his loss, and said: "Oh, come easy, go easy!"

A few years ago he subscribed to a matrimonial paper, and one day he appeared at the office of the probate judge with a mail-order wife, who, when they had been married a few years, went to an orphan asylum and got a mail-order baby. We have had considerable sport with Mail-Order Petrie, and he has become so used to it that he likes it. Sometimes on dull days he comes around to the office to tell us what a bargain he got at this or that mail-order house, and last summer he came in to tell us about a great bargain in a cemetery lot in a new cemetery being laid out in Kansas City; he bought it on the installment plan, a dollar down and twenty-five cents a month, to be paid until he

died, and he bragged a great deal about his shrewdness in getting the lot on those terms. He chuckled as he said that he would be dead in five years at the most and would have a seventy-five dollar lot for a mere song. He made us promise that when that time does come we will write up his obsequies under the head "A Mail-Order Funeral." He added, as he stood with his hand on the door screen, that he had no use for the preachers and the hypocrites in the churches in this town, and that he was taking a paper called the "Magazine of Mysteries," that teaches some new ideas on religion and that he expects to wind up in a mail-order Heaven.

And this is the material with which we do our day's work—Mail-Order Petrie, Marshal Furgeson, the pretty girls in the flower parade, the wise clubwomen, the cut-glass society crowd, the proud owner of the automobile, the "respectable parties concerned," the proprietor of the Golden Eagle, the clerks in the Bee Hive, the country crook who aspires to be a professional criminal some day, "the leading citizen," who spends much of his time seeing the sights of his country,

the college boys who wear funny clothes and ribbons on their hats, and the politicians, greedy for free advertising. They are ordinary two-legged men and women, and if there is one thing more than any other that marks our town, it is its charity, and the mercy that is at the bottom of all its real impulses.

Our business seems to outsiders to be a cruel one, because we have to deal as mere business with such sacred things as death and birth, the meeting and parting of friends, and with tragedies as well as with comedies. This is true. Every man—even a piano tuner—thinks his business leads him a dog's life, and that it shows him only the seamy side of the world. But our business, though it shows the seams, shows us more of good than of bad in men. We are not cynics in our office; for we know in a thousand ways that the world is good. We know that at the end of the day we have set down more good deeds than bad deeds, and that the people in our town will keep the telephone bell ringing to-morrow, more to praise the recital of a good action than they will to talk to us about some evil thing that we had to print.

Time and again we have been surprised at the charity of our people. They are always willing to forgive, and be it man or woman who takes a misstep in our town—which is the counterpart of hundreds of American towns—if the offender shows that he wishes to walk straight, a thousand hands are stretched out to help him and guide him. It is not true that a man or woman who makes a mistake is eternally damned by his fellows. If one persists in wrong after the first misdeed it is not because sheltering love and kindness were not thrown around the wrongdoer. We have in our town women who have done wrong and have lived down their errors just as men do, and have been forgiven. A hundred times in our office we have talked these things over and have been proud of our people and of their humanity. We are all neighbours and friends, and when sorrow comes, no one is alone. The town's greatest tragedies have proved the town's sympathy, and have been worth their cost.

II

The Young Prince

WE have had many reporters for our little country newspaper—some good ones, who have gone up to the city and have become good newspaper men; some bad ones, who have gone back to the livery-stables from which they sprang; and some indifferent ones, who have drifted into the insurance business and have become silent partners in student boarding-houses, taking home the meat for dinner and eating finically at the second table of life, with a first table discrimination. But of all the boys who have sat at the old walnut desk by the window, the Young Prince gave us the most joy. Before he came on the paper he was bell-boy at the National Hotel—bell-hop, he called himself—and he first attracted our attention by handing in personal items written in a fat, florid hand. He seemed to have second sight. He knew more news than anyone else in town—who had gone away, who was entertain-

ing company, who was getting married, and who was sick or dying.

The day the Young Prince went to work he put on his royal garment—a ten-dollar ready-made costume that cost him two weeks' hard work. But it was worth the effort. His freckled face and his tawny shock of red hair rose above the gorgeous plaid of the clothes like a prairie sunset, and as he pranced off down the street he was clearly proud of his job. This pride never left him. He knew all the switchmen in the railroad yards, all the girls in the dry-goods stores, all the boys on the grocers' waggons, all the hack-drivers and all the barbers in town.

These are the great sources of news for a country daily. The reporter who confines his acquaintance to doctors, lawyers, merchants and preachers is always complaining of dull days.

But there was never a dull day with the Young Prince. When he could get the list of "those present" at a social function in no other way, he called up the hired girl of the festal house—we are such a small town that only the rich bankers keep servants—and "made a date" with her, and the names always

appeared in the paper the next day; whereupon the proud hostess, who thought it was bad form to give out the names of her guests, sent down and bought a dozen extra copies of the paper to send away to her Eastern kin. He knew all the secrets of the switch shanty. Our paper printed the news of a change in the general superintendent's office of the railroad before the city papers had heard of it, and we usually figured it out that the day after the letter denying our story had come down from the Superintendent's office the change would be officially announced.

One day when the Prince was at the depot "making the train" with his notebook in his hand, jotting down the names of the people who got on or off the cars, the general superintendent saw him, and called the youth to his car.

"Well, kid," said the most worshipful one in his teasingest voice, "What's the latest news at the general offices to-day?"

The Young Prince turned his head on one side like a little dog looking up at a big dog, and replied:

"Well, if you must know it, you're going to

get the can, though we ain't printing it till you've got a chance to land somewhere else."

The longer the Prince worked the more clothes he bought. One of his most effective creations was a blue serge coat and vest, and a pair of white duck trousers linked by emotional red socks to patent-leather shoes. This confection, crowned with a wide, saw-edged straw hat with a blue band, made him the brightest bit of colour on the sombre streets of our dull town. He wore his collars so high that he had to order them of a drummer, and as he came down street from the depot, riding magnificently with the 'bus-driver, after the train had gone, the clerks used to cry: "Look out for your horses; the steam-piano is coming!"

But it didn't affect the Young Prince. If he happened to have time and was feeling like it, he would climb down over the rear end of the 'bus and chase his tormentor into the back of the store where he worked, but generally the Young Prince took no heed of the jibes of the envious. He was conscious that he was cutting a figure, and this consciousness made him proud. But his pride did not cut down the stack of copy

that he laid on the table every morning and every noon. He couldn't spell and he was innocent of grammar, and every line he wrote had to be edited, but he got the news. He was everywhere. He rushed down the streets after an item, dodging in and out of stores and offices like a streak of chain lightning having a fit. But it was beneath his dignity to run to fires. When the fire-bell rang, he waited nonchalantly on the corner near the fire-department house, and as the crowds parted to let the horses dash by on the dead run, he would walk calmly to the middle of the street, put his notebook in his pocket, and, as the fire-team plunged by, he would ostentatiously throw out a stiff leg behind him like the tail of a comet, and "flip" onto the end of the fire-waggon. Then he would turn slowly around, raise a hand, and wiggle his fingers patronisingly at the girls in front of the Racket Store as he flew past, swaying his body with the motion of the rolling, staggering cart.

Other reporters who have been on the paper —the good ones as well as the bad—have had to run the gauntlet of the town jokers who delight to give green reporters bogus news, or start them

out hunting impossible items. But the man who soberly told the Young Prince that O. F. C. Taylor was visiting at the home of the town drunkard, or that W. H. McBreyer had accepted a position in a town drug-store, only got a wink and a grin from the boy. Neither did the town wags fool him by giving him a birth announcement from the wrong family, nor a wedding where there was none. He was wise as a serpent. Where he got his wisdom, no one knows. He had the town catalogued in a sort of rogues' directory—the liars and the honest men set apart from one another, and it was a classification that would not have tallied with the church directories nor with the town blue-book nor with the commercial agency's reports. The sheep and the goats in the Young Prince's record would have been strangers to one another if they could have been assembled as he imagined them. But he was generally right in his estimates of men. He had a sixth sense for sham.

The Young Prince had the sense to know the truth and the courage to write it. This is the essence of the genius that is required to make a good newspaper man. No paper has trouble get-

ting reporters who can hand in copy that records events from the outside. Any blockhead can go to a public meeting and bring in a report that has the words "as follows" scattered here and there down the columns. But the reporter who can go and bring back the soul of the meeting, the real truth about it—what the inside fights meant that lay under the parliamentary politenesses of the occasion; who can see the wires that reach back of the speakers, and see the man who is moving the wires and can know why he is moving them; who can translate the tall talking into history—he is a real reporter. And the Young Prince was that kind of a youth. He went to the core of everything; and if we didn't dare print the truth—as sometimes we did not—he grumbled for a week about his luck. As passionately as he loved his clothes, he was always ready to get them dirty in the interests of his business.

For three years his nimble feet pounded the sidewalks of the town. He knew no business hours, and ate and slept with his work. He never ceased to be a reporter—never took off his make-up, never let down from his exalted part.

One day he fell sick of a fever, and for three weeks fretted and fumed in delirium. In his dreams he wrote pay locals, and made trains, and described funerals, got lists of names for the society column, and grumbled because his stuff was cut or left over till the next day. When he awoke he was weak and wan, and they felt that they must tell him the truth.

The doctor took the boy's hands and told him very simply what they feared. He looked at the man for a moment in dumb wonder, and sighed a long, tired sigh. Then he said: "Well, if I must, here goes"—and turned his face to the wall and closed his eyes without a tremor.

And thus the Young Prince went home.

III

The Society Editor

THEY say that in the newspaper offices of the city men work in ruts; that the editorial writer never reports an item, no matter how much he knows of it; that a reporter is not allowed to express an editorial view of a subject, even though he be well qualified to speak; but on our little country daily newspaper it is entirely different. We work on the interchangeable point system. Everyone writes items, all of us get advertising and job-work when it comes our way, and when one of us writes anything particularly good, it is marked for the editorial page. The religious reporter does the racing matinée in Wildwood Park, and the financial editor who gets the market reports from the feed-store men also gets any church news that comes along.

The only time we ever established a department was when we made Miss Larrabee society editor. She came from the high school,



As an office joke the boys used to leave a step-ladder by her desk so that she could climb up and see how her top-knot really looked

where her graduating essay on Kipling attracted our attention, and, after an office council had decided that a Saturday society page would be a paying proposition.

At first, say for six months after she came to the office, Miss Larrabee devoted herself to the accumulation of professional pride. This pride was as much a part of her life as her pompadour, which at that time was so high that she had to tiptoe to reach it. However she managed to keep it up was the wonder of the office. Finally, we all agreed that she must use chicken-fence. She denied this, but was inclined to be good-natured about it, and, as an office-joke, the boys used to leave a step-ladder by her desk so that she could climb up and see how her top-knot really looked. Nothing ruffled her spirits, and we soon quit teasing her and began to admire her work. In addition to filling six columns of the Saturday's paper with her society report in a town where a church social is important enough to justify publishing the names of those who wait on the tables, Miss Larrabee was a credit to the office.

She was always invited to the entertainments

at the homes of the Worthingtons and the Conklins, who had stationary wash-tubs in the basements of their houses, and who ate dinner instead of supper in the evening; and when she put on what the boys called her trotting harness, her silk petticoats rustled louder than any others at the party. One day she suddenly dropped her pompadour and appeared with her hair parted in the middle and doused over her ears in long, undulating billows. No other girl in town came within a quarter of an inch of Miss Larrabee's dare. When straight-fronts became stylish, Miss Larrabee was a vertical marvel, and when she rolled up her sleeves and organized a country club, she referred to her shoes as boots and took the longest steps in town. But with it all she was no mere clothes-horse. We drilled it into her head during her first two weeks that "society" news in a country town means not merely the doings of the cut-glass set, but that it means as well the doings of the Happy Hoppers, the Trundle-Bed Trash, the Knights of Columbus, the Rathbone Sisters, the King's Daughters, the Epworth League, the Christian Endeavourers, the Woman's Relief Corps, the

Ladies' Aid and the Home Missionary Societies, Miss Nelson's Dancing Class, the Switchmen's annual ball—if we get their job-work—and every kindred, every tribe, except such as gather in what is known as " kitchen sweats " and occasionally send in calls for the police. When Miss Larrabee got this into her head she began to groan under her burden, and by the end of the year, though she had great pride in her profession, she affected to loathe her department.

Weddings were her especial abominations. When the first social cloud appeared on the horizon indicating the approach of a series of showers for the bride which would culminate in a cloudburst at some stone church, Miss Larrabee would begin to rumble like distant thunder and, as the storm grew thicker, she would flash out crooked chain-lightning imprecations on the heads of the young people, their fathers and mothers and uncles and aunts. By the day of the wedding she would be rolling a steady diapason of polite, decolourised, expurgated, ladylike profanity.

While she sat at her desk writing the stereotyped account of the event, it was like picking

up a live wire to speak to her. As she wrote, we could tell at just what stage she had arrived in her copy. Thus, if she said to the adjacent atmosphere, "What a whopper!" we knew that she had written, "The crowning glory of a happy fortnight of social gatherings found its place when——" and when she hissed out, "Mortgaged clear to the eaves and full of installment furniture!" we felt that she had reached a point something like this: "After the ceremony the gay party assembled at the palatial home." In a moment she would snarl: "I am dead tired of seeing Mrs. Merriman's sprawly old fern and the Bosworth palm. I wish they would stop lending them!" and then we realised that she had reached the part of her write-up which said: "The chancel rail was banked with a profusion of palms and ferns and rare tropical plants." She always groaned when she came to the "simple and impressive ring ceremony." When she wrote:

"The distinguished company came forward to offer congratulations to the newly-wedded pair," she would say as she sharpened her pencil-point: "There's nothing like a wedding

to reveal what a raft of common kin people have," and we knew that it was all over and that she was closing the article with: "A dazzling array of costly and beautiful presents was exhibited in the library," for then she would pick up her copy, dog-ear the sheets, and jab them on the hook as she sighed: "Another great American pickle-dish exhibit ended."

In the way she did two things Miss Larrabee excited the wonder and admiration of the office. One was the way that she kept tab on brides. We heard through her of the brides who could cook, and of those who were beginning life by accumulating a bright little pile of tin cans in the alley. She knew the brides who could do their own sewing and those who could not. She had the single girl's sniff at the bride who wore her trousseau season after season, made over and fixed up, and she gave the office the benefit of her opinion of the husband in the case who had a new tailor-made suit every fall and spring. She scented young married troubles from afar, and we knew in the office whether his folks were edging up on her, or her people were edging up on him. If a young married

man danced more than twice in one evening with anyone but his wife, Miss Larrabee made faces at his back when he passed the office window, and if she caught a young married woman flirting, Miss Larrabee regaled us by telling with whom the woman in question had opened a " fresh bottle of emotions."

The other way in which Miss Larrabee displayed genius for her work was in describing women's costumes. Three or four times a year, when there are large social gatherings, we print descriptions of the women's gowns. Only three women in our town, Mrs. Worthington, Mrs. Conklin, and the second Mrs. Markley, have more than one new party dress in a twelvemonth, and most of the women make a party gown last two or three years. Miss Larrabee was familiar with every dress in town. She knew it made over, and no woman was cunning enough to conceal the truth even with a spangled yoke, a chiffon bertha, or a net overdress; yet Miss Larrabee would describe the gown, not merely twice, but half a dozen times, so that the woman wearing it might send the description to her relatives back East without arous-

ing their suspicion that she was wearing the same dress year after year. Therefore, whenever Miss Larrabee wrote up the dresses worn at a party, we were sure to sell from fifty to a hundred extra papers. She could so turn a breastpin and a homemade point-lace handkerchief tucked in the front of a good old lady's best black satin into "point-lace and diamonds," that they were always good for a dozen copies of the paper, and she never overlooked the dress of the wife of a good advertiser, no matter how plain it might be.

She was worth her wages to the office merely as a compendium of shams. She knew whether the bridal couple, who announced that they would spend their honeymoon in the East, were really going to Niagara Falls, or whether they were going to spend a week with his relatives in Decatur, Illinois. She knew every woman in town who bought two prizes for her whist party—one to give if her friend should win the prize, and another to give if the woman she hated should win. With the diabolical eye of a fiend she detected the woman who was wearing the dry-cleaned cast-off clothing of her

sister in the city. What she saw the office knew, though she kept her conclusions out of the paper if they would do any harm or hurt anyone's feelings. No pretender ever dreamed that she was not fooling Miss Larrabee. She was willing to agree most sympathetically with Mrs. Conklin, who insisted that the "common people" wouldn't be interested in the list of names at her party; and the only place where we ever saw Miss Larrabee's claw in print was in the insistent misspelling of the name of a woman who made it a point to ridicule the paper.

We have had other girls around the office since Miss Larrabee left, but they do not seem to get the work done with any system. She was not only industrious but practical. Friday mornings, when her work piled up, instead of fussing around the office and chattering at the telephone, she would dive into her desk and bring up her regular list of adjectives. These she would copy on three slips, carefully dividing the list so that no one had a duplicate, and in the afternoon each of the boys received a slip with a list of parties, and with instructions to scatter the adjectives she had given him

through the accounts of the parties assigned to him—and the work was soon done. There was no scratching the head for synonyms for "beautiful," "superb" or "elegant." Miss Larrabee had doled out to each of us the adjectives necessary, and, given the adjectives, society reporting is easy. The editing of the copy is easy also, for one does not have to remember whether or not the refreshments were "delicious" at the Jones party when he sees the word in connection with the viands at the Smith party. No two parties were ever "elegant" the same week. No two events were "charming." No two women were "exquisitely" gowned. The person who was assigned the adjective "delightful" by Miss Larrabee might stick it in front of a luncheon, pin it on a hostess, or use it for an evening's entertainment. But he could use it only once. And with a list of those present and the adjectives thereunto appertaining, even a new boy could get up a column in half an hour. She had an artist's pride in the finished work, however much she might dislike the thing in making, and she used to sail down to the press-room as soon as the

paper was out, and, picking up the paper from the folder, she would stand reading her page, line upon line, precept upon precept, though every word and syllable was familiar to her.

During her first year she joined the Woman's State Press Club, but she discovered that she was the only real worker in the club and never attended a second meeting. She told us that too many of the women wore white stockings and low shoes, read their own unpublished short stories, and regarded her wide-shouldered shirtwaist and melodramatic openwork hosiery with suspicion and alarm.

As the years passed, and wedding after wedding sizzled under her pen, she complained to us that she was beginning to be called " auntie " in too many houses, and that the stock of available young men who didn't wear their handkerchiefs under their collars at the dances had dwindled down to three. This reality faces every girl who lives in a country town. Then she is left with two alternatives: to go visiting or to begin bringing them up by hand.

Miss Larrabee went visiting. At the end of a month she wrote: " It's all over with me. He

is a nice fellow, and has a job doing 'Live Topics About Town' here on the *Sun*. Give my job to the little Wheatly girl, and tell her to quit writing poetry, and hike up her dress in the back. My adjectives are in the left-hand corner of the desk under 'When Knighthood Was in Flower.' And do you suppose you could get me and the grand keeper of the records and seals a pass home for Christmas if I'd do you a New York letter some time?

"They say these city papers are hog tight!"

IV

"As a Breath into the Wind"

WE are proud of the machinery in our office—the two linotypes, the big perfecting press and the little jobbers. They are endowed by office traditions with certain human attributes—having their moods and vagaries and tantrums—so we love them as men love children. And this is a queer thing about them: though our building is pocked with windows that are open by day seven months in the year, and though the air of the building is clean enough, save for the smell of the ink, yet at night, after the machines have been idle for many hours and are probably asleep, the place smells like the lair of wild animals. By day they are as clean as machines may be kept. And even in the days when David Lewis petted them and coddled them and gave them the core of his heart, they were speckless, and bright as his big, brown, Welsh eyes, but the night stinks of them were rank and beastly.

David came to us, a stray cat, fifteen years ago. He was too small to wrestle with the forms—being cast in the nonpareil mould of his race—and so we put him to carrying papers. In school season he seemed to go to school, and in summer it is certain that he put a box on a high stool in the back room, and learned the printer's case, and fed the job presses at odd times, and edged on to the pay-roll without ever having been formally hired. In the same surreptitious manner he slipped a cot into the stockroom upstairs and slept there, and finally had it fitted up as a bedroom, and so became an office fixture.

By the time his voice had stopped squeaking he was a good printer, and what with using the front office for a study at night, and the New York papers and the magazines for textbooks, he had acquired a good working education. Whereupon he fell in love with two divinities at once—the blonde one working in the Racket Store, on Main Street, and the other, a new linotype that we installed the year before McKinley's first election. His heart was sadly torn between them. He never went to bed

under midnight after calling on either of them, and, having the Celt's natural aptitude to get at the soul of either women or intricate mechanism, in a year he was engaged to both; but naturally enough a brain fever overtook him, and he lay on a cot at the Sisters' Hospital and jabbered strange things.

Among other things the priest who sat beside him one day heard Latin verse; whereat the father addressed David in the language of the Church and received reply in kind. And they talked solemnly about matters theological for five minutes, David's voice changing to the drone of the liturgist's and his face flushing with uncaged joy. In an hour there were three priests with the boy, and he spoke in Latin to them without faltering. He discussed abstruse ecclesiastical questions and claimed incidentally to be an Italian priest dead a score of years, and, to prove his claim, described Rome and the Vatican as it was before Leo's day. Then he fell asleep and the next day was better and knew no Latin, but insisted on reading the note under his pillow which his girl had sent him. After that he wanted to know how New York

stood in the National League and how Hans Wagner's batting record was, and proceeded to get well in short order.

David resumed his place in the office, and when we put in the perfecting press he added another string to his bow. The press and the linotype and his girl were his life's passions, and his position as short-stop in the Maroons, and as snare-drummer in the Second Regiment band, were his diversions. He wore clothes well and became president of the Imperial Dancing Club—chiefly to please his girl, who desired social position. A boy with twelve dollars a week in a country town, who will spend a dollar or two a month to have his clothes pressed, can accomplish any social heights which rise before him, and there is no barrier in our town to a girl merely because she presides at the ribbon-counter; which, of course, is as it should be.

So David became a town personage. When the linotype operator left, we gave David the place. Now he courted only one of his sweethearts by night, and found time for other things. Also we gave him three dollars a

week more to spend, and the Imperial Club got most of it—generally through the medium of the blonde in the Racket Store, who was cultivating a taste for diamonds, and liked to wear flowers at the more formal dances.

Now, unless they are about to be married, a boy of twenty may not call on a girl of nineteen in a respectable family, a member of the Plymouth Daughters, and a graduate of the High School, oftener than four nights in the week, without exciting more or less neighbourly comment; but David and the girl were merely going together—as the parlance of our town has it—and though they were engaged they had no idea of getting married at any definite time. David thus had three nights in the seven which might be called open. The big press would not receive him by night, and he spent his love on his linotype by day; so he was lonesome and longed for the society of his kind. The billiard-hall did not tempt him; but at the cigar-store he met and fell under the spell of Henry Larmy—known of the town as "Old Hen," though he was not two score years gone—and the two began chumming together.

"Old Hen" worked in a tin-shop, read Ruskin, regarded Debs as a prophet, received many papers devoted to socialism and the New Thought, and believed that he believed in no man, no God and no devil. Also he was a woman-hater, and though he never turned his head for a petticoat, preached free-love and bought many books which promised to tell him how to become a hypnotist. At various times, Larmy's category of beliefs included the single-tax, Buddhism, spiritualism, and a faith in the curative properties of blue glass. David and Henry Larmy would sit in the office of evenings discussing these things when honest people should be in bed.

Henry never could tell us just how the talk drifted to hypnotism and the occult, nor when the current started that way. But one of the reporters who happened to be driven off the street by the rain one night found Henry and David in the office with a home-made planchette doing queer things. They made it tell words in the middle of pages of newspapers that neither had opened. They made it write answers to sums that neither had calculated,

and they made it give the names of Henry's relatives dead and gone—also those that were living, whom David, who was operating it, did not know. The thing would not move for the man, but the boy's fingers on it made it fly. Some way the triangular board broke, and the reporter and Henry were pop-eyed with wonder to see David hold his hands above the pencil and make it write, dragging a splinter of board behind it. David yawned five or six times and lay down on the office couch, and when he got up a moment later his hands were fingering the air, his lips fluttering like the wings of fledglings, and he seemed to be trying some new kind of lingo. He did not look about him, but went straight to the table, gripped the air above the pencil with the broken board upon it, and the pencil came up and began writing something, evidently in verse. David's face was shiny and smiling the while, but his eyes were fixed, though his lips moved as they do when one writes and is unused to it. Larmy stared at the boy with open mouth, clearly afraid of the spectacle that was before him. A night creaking of the building made him jump, and he

moistened his lips as the pencil wrote on. When the sheet was filled, the pencil fell and David looked about him with a smile and dropping his head on the desk began to yawn. He seemed to be coming out of a deep sleep, and grinned up blinking: "Gee, I must 'a' gone to sleep on you fellows. I was up late last night."

Larmy told the boy what had happened, and the three of them looked at the paper, but could make nothing of it. David shook his head.

"Not on your life," he laughed. "What do you fellers take me for—a phonograph having the D. T.'s, or a mimeograph with a past? Uh-huh! Not for little David! Why—say, that is some kind of Dutch!"

The reporter knew enough to know that it was Latin, but his High School days were five years behind him, and he could not translate it. The Latin professor at the college, however, said that it seemed to be an imitation of Ovid.

And the next time the reporter saw a light in the office window he broke into the seance. When the boy and his girl were not holding down the sofa at her father's home, or when there was no dance at the Imperial Club hall,

nor any other social diversion, David and Larmy and the reporter would meet at the office and dive into things too deep for Horatio's philosophy.

Their favourite theme was the immortality of the soul, and when they were on this theme David would get nervous, pace up and down the office, and finally throw himself on the lounge and begin to yawn. Whereupon a control, or state of mind, or personality that called itself Fra Guiseppi would rise to consciousness and dominate the boy. Larmy and the reporter called it "father," and talked to it with considerable jocularity, considering that the father claimed they were talking to a ghost. It would do odd things for them; go into rooms where David had never been: describe their furnishings and occupants accurately; read the numbers on watches of prominent citizens, which the reporter would verify the next day; and pretend to bring other departed spirits into the room to discuss various matters. Larmy had a pleasant social chat with Karl Marx, and had the spirits hunting all over the kingdom-come for Tom Paine and Murat. But the messenger

either could not find them, or the line was busy with someone else, so these worthies never appeared.

Still, this must be said of the "father," that it had a philosophy of life, and a distinct personality far deeper and more charming and in some way sweeter than David's; that it talked with an accent, which to the hearers seemed Italian, and in a voice that certainly could not have been the boy's by any trick of ventriloquism. One night in their talks Larmy said:

"'Father,' you say you believe that the judgments of God are just—how do you account for the sufferings, the heartaches, the sorrows, the misery that come in the wake of those judgments? Here is a great railway accident that strikes down twenty people, renders some cripples for life, kills others. Here is a flood that sweeps away the property of good men and bad men. Is that just? What compensation is there for it?"

The "father" put his chin in one hand and remained silent for a time, as one deep in thought; then he replied:

"That is—what you call—life. That is

what makes life, life; what makes it different from the existence we know now. All your misfortunes, your hardships, your joys, all your miseries and failures and triumphs—these are the school of the soul which you call life. It is a preparation for the hereafter."

And David waking knew nothing of the thing that possessed him sleeping. When they told him, he would smoke his cigarette, and make reply that he must have had 'em pretty bad this time, or that he was glad he wasn't that "buggy" when he was awake.

David's talent soon became known in the office. We used to call it his spook, but only once did we harness it to practical business and that was when old Charley Hedrick, the local boss, was picking a candidate for the Legislature. The reporter and Larmy asked the "father" one night if it could get us connected with Mr. Hedrick. It said it would try; it needed help. And there appeared another personality with which they were more or less familiar, called the Jew. The Jew claimed to be a literary man, and said it would act as receiver while the father acted as transmitter on

Hedrick. Then they got this one-sided telephonic conversation in a thick, wheezy voice that was astonishingly like Hedrick's:

"Harmony—hell, yes; we're always getting the harmony and the Worthington state bank gets the offices." Then a pause ensued. "Well, let 'em bolt. I'm getting tired of giving up the whole county ticket to them fellows to keep 'em from bolting." After another pause, he seemed to answer someone: "Oh, Bill?—you can't trust him! He's played both sides in this town for ten years. What I want isn't a man to satisfy them, but just this once I want a man who won't be even under the suspicion of satisfying them. I want a fellow to satisfy me." The other side of the telephone must have spoken, for this came: "Well, then, we'll bust their damn bank! Did you see their last statement: cash down to fifteen per cent. and no dividends on half a million assets for a year and a half? Something's rotten there. They're a lot of 'toads in a poisoned tank,' as old Browning says. If they want a fight, they can have it." After the silence he replied: "I tell you fellows they can't afford a fight. And, anyway, there'll never be

peace in this town till we get things on the basis of one bank, one newspaper, one wife and one country, and the way to do that is to get out in the open and fight. If I've got as much sense as a rabbit I say that Ab Handy is the man, and whether I'm right or wrong I'm going to run him." He seemed to retort to some objector: "Yes, and the first thing you know he'd come charging up to the Speaker's desk with a maximum freight-rate bill, or a stockyards bill—and where would I be? I tell you he won't stand hitched. He'll swell up like a pizened pup, and you couldn't handle him. Where'd any of us be, if the Representative from this county got to pawing the air for reform? I know Jake as though I'd been through him with a lantern." There must have been a discussion of some kind among the others, for a lengthy interim followed; then the voice continued: "Elect him?—of course we can elect him. I can get five hundred from the State Committee and we can raise that much down here. This is a Republican year, and we could elect Judas Iscariot against any of the eleven brethren this year on the Republican ticket, and I tell

you it's Ab. You fellows can do as you please, but I'm going to run Ab."

Then, being full of political curiosity rather than impelled by a desire for psychological research, the reporter slipped out and waited in a stairway opposite the Exchange National Bank building until the light in Hedrick's law office was extinguished. Then he saw old Charley and his henchmen come out, one at a time, look cautiously up and down the street and go forth in different, devious ways. The story in our paper the next day of the candidacy of Ab Handy threw consternation into the ranks of the enemy. We had printed the conversation as it had occurred, after which five men publicly contended that one of their number was a traitor.

The summer browned the pastures, and the coming of autumn brought trouble for David Lewis, president of the Imperial Dancing Club, short-stop for the Maroons, snare-drummer in the band, and operator of linotypes. We who are at the period of life where love is a harvest forget the days of the harrow, and are prone to smile at the season of the seeding. We do not know that the heaviest burden God puts on a

young soul is a burden of the heart. A travelling silk-salesman, with a haughty manner and a two-hundred-dollar job, saw the blonde in the Racket Store and began calling at her father's home like the captain of an army with banners. David, being only an armour-bearer at fifteen dollars a week, found heartbreak in it all for him. A girl of twenty is so much older than a boy of twenty-one that the blonde began to assume a maternal attitude toward the boy, and he took to walking afield on Sundays, looking at the sky in agony and asking his little " now-I-lay-me " God, what life was given to him for. He fabricated a legend that she was selling herself for gold, and when the haughty manner and the blonde sped by David's window behind jingling sleigh-bells that winter, David, sitting at the machine, got back proofs from the front office that looked like war-maps of a strange country. Moreover he let his matrices go uncleaned until they were beardy as wheat and the bill of repairs on the machine had begun to rise like a cat's back.

All of this may seem funny in the telling, but to see the little Welshman's heart breaking in

him was no pleasant matter. The girls in the office pitied the boy, and hoped the silk-drummer would break her heart. The town and the Imperial Club, whereof David was much beloved, took sides with him, and knew his sorrow for their own. As for the blonde, it was only nature asserting itself in her; so David got back his little chip diamonds, and his bangle bracelet, and his copy of " Riley's Love Songs," and there was the " mist and the blinding rain " for him, and the snow of winter hardened on the sidewalks.

To console himself, the boy traded for a music-box, which he set going with a long brass lever. Its various tunes were picked in holes on circular steel sheets, which were fed into the box and set whirling with the lever. At night when Larmy wasn't enjoying what David called a spook-fest, the boy would sit in the office by the hour and listen to his music-box. He must have played " Love's Golden Dream Is Past " a hundred lonesome times that winter (it had been their favourite waltz—his and the girl's—at the Imperial Club), and it was a safe guess that if the boys in the office, as they

passed the box at noon, would give the lever a yank, from the abdomen of the contrivance the waltz song would begin deep and low to rumble and swell out with all the simulation of sorrow that a mechanical soul may express.

As the winter deepened, Larmy and the reporter and the " father " had more and more converse. The " father " explained a theory of immortality which did not interest the reporter, but which Larmy heard eagerly. It said that science would resolve matter into mere forms of motion, which are expressions of divine will, and that the only place where this divine will exists in its pure state, eluding the so-called material state, is in the human soul. Further, the " father " explained that this soul, or divine will, exists without the brain, independent of brain tissue, as may be proved by the accepted phenomena of hypnotism, where the soul is commanded to leave the body and see and hear and feel and know things which the mere physical organs can not experience, owing to the interposition of space. The " father " said that at death the Divine Will commands the ripened seed of life to leave the

body and assume immortality, just as that Will commands the seeds of plants and the sperm of animals to assume their natural functions. The Thing that talked through David's lips said that the body is the seed-pod of the soul, and that souls grow little or much as they are planted and environed and nurtured by life. All this it said in many nights, while Larmy wondered and the reporter scoffed and stuck pins in David to see if he could feel them. And the boy wakened from his dreams always to say: "Gimme a cigarette!" and to reach over and pull the lever of his music-box, and add: "Perfessor, give us a tune! Hen, the professor says he won't play unless you give me a cigarette for him."

One night, after a long wrangle which ended in a discourse by the "father," a strange thing happened. Larmy and It were contending as to whether It was merely a hypnotic influence on the boy, of someone living whom they did not know, or what It claimed to be, a disembodied spirit. By way of diversion, the reporter had just run a binder's needle under one of the boy's finger-nails to see whether he would flinch.

Then the Voice that was coming from David's mouth spoke and said: "I will show you something to prove it;" and the entranced boy rose and went to the back room, while the two others followed him.

He turned the lever that flashed the light on his linotype, and set the little motor going. He lifted up the lid of the metal-pot, to see if the fire was keeping it molten. Then the boy sat at the machine with his hands folded in his lap, gazing at the empty copy-holder out of dead eyes. In a minute—perhaps it was a little longer—a brass matrix slipped from the magazine and clicked down into the assembler; in a second or two another fell, and then, very slowly, like the ticks of a great clock, the brasses slipped—slipped—slipped into their places, and the steel spaces dropped into theirs. A line was formed, while the boy's hands lay in his lap. When it was a full line he grabbed the lever, that sent the line over to the metal-pot to be cast, and his hand fell back in his lap, while the dripping of the brasses continued and the blue and white keys on the board sank and rose, although no finger touched them.

Larmy squinted at the thing, and held his long, fuzzy, unshaven chin in his hand. When the second line was cast the reporter broke the silence with: "Well, I'll be damned!" And the Voice from David's mouth replied: "Very likely." And the clicking of the brasses grew quicker.

Seven lines were cast and then the boy got up and went back to the couch in the front room, where he yawned himself, apparently, through three strata of consciousness, into his normal self. They took a proof of what had been cast, but it was in Latin and they could not translate it. David himself forgot about it the next day, but the reporter, being impressed and curious, took the proof to the teacher of Latin at the college, who translated it thus: *"He shall go away on a long journey across the ocean, and he shall not return, yet the whole town shall see him again and know him—and he shall bring back the song that is in his heart, and you shall hear it."*

The next week the "Maine" was blown up, and in the excitement the troubles of David were forgotten in the office. Moreover, as he

had to work overtime he put his soul deeper into the machine, and his nerves took on something of the steel in which he lived. The Associated Press report was long in those days, and the paper was filled with local news of wars and rumours of wars, so that when the call for troops came in the early spring, the town was eager for it, and David could not wait for the local company to form, but went to Lawrence and enlisted with the Twentieth Kansas. He was our first war-hero for thirty years, and the town was proud of him. Most of the town knew why he went, and there was reproach for the blonde in the Racket Store, who had told the girls it would be in June and that they were going East for a wedding trip.

When David came back from Lawrence an enlisted man, with a week in which to prepare for the fray, the Imperial Club gave him a farewell dance of great pride, in that one end of Imperial Hall was decorated for the occasion with all the Turkish rugs, and palms, and ferns, and piano-lamps with red shades, and American flags draped from the electric fixtures, and all the cut-glass and hand-painted

punch-bowls that the girls of the T. T. T. Club could beg or borrow; and red lemonade and raspberry sherbet flowed like water. Whereat David Lewis was so pleased that he grew tearful when he came into the hall and saw the splendour that had been made for him. But his soul, despite his gratitude to the boys and girls who gave the party, was filled with an unutterable sadness; and he sat out many dances under the red lamp-shades with the various girls who had been playing sister to him; and the boys to whom the girls were more than sisters were not jealous.

As for the blonde, she beamed and preened and smiled on David, but her name was not on his card, and as the silk-salesman was on the road, she had many vacant lines on her programme, and she often sat alone by a card-table shuffling the deck that lay there. The boy's eyes were dead when they looked at her and her smile did not coax him to her. Once when the others were dancing an extra David sat across the room from her, and she went to him and sat by him, and said under the music:

"I thought we were always going to be

friends—David?" And after he had parried her for a while, he rose to go away, and she said: "Won't you dance just once with me Dave, just for old sake's sake before you go?" And he put down his name for the next extra and thought of how long it had been since the last June dance. Old sake's sake with youth may mean something that happened only day before yesterday.

The boy did not speak to his partner during the next dance but went about debating something in his mind; and when the number was ended he tripped over to the leader of the orchestra, whom he had hired for dances a score of times, and asked for "Love's Golden Dream Is Past" as the next "extra." It was his waltz and he didn't care if the whole town knew it—they would dance it together. And so when the orchestra began he started away, a very heart-broken, brown-eyed, olive-skinned little Welshman, who barely touched the finger-tips of a radiant, overdeveloped blonde with roses in her cheeks and moonlight in her hair. She would have come closer to him but he danced away and only hunted for her

soul with his brown Celtic eyes. And because David had asked for it and they loved the boy, the old men in the orchestra played the waltz over and over again, and at the end the dancers clapped their hands for an encore, and when the chorus began they sang it dancing, and the boy found the voice which cheered the "Men of Harlech," the sweet, cadent voice of his race, and let out his heart in the words.

When he led her to a seat, the blonde had tears on her eyelashes as she choked a "good-by, Dave" to him, but he turned away without answering her and went to find his next partner. It was growing late and the crowd soon went down the long, dark stairway leading from Imperial Hall, into the moonlight and down the street, singing and humming and whistling "Love's Golden Dream," and the next day they and the town and the band came down to the noon train to see the conquering hero go.

It was lonesome in the office after David went, and his music-box in the corner was dumb, for we couldn't find the brass lever for it, though the printers and the reporters hunted in his trunk and in every place they could think of.

But the lonesomest things in the world for him were the machines. The big press grew sulky and kept breaking the web, and his linotype took to absorbing castor-oil as if it were a kind of hasheesh. The new operator could run the new machine, but David's seemed to resent familiarity. It was six months before we got things going straight after he left us.

He wrote us soldier letters from the Presidio, and from mid-ocean, and from the picket-line in front of Manila. One afternoon the messenger-boy came in snuffling with a sheet of the Press-report. David's name was among the killed. Then we turned the column rules on the first page and got out the paper early to give the town the news. Henry Larmy brought in an obituary, the next day, which needed much editing, and we printed it under the head "A Tribute from a Friend," and signed Larmy's name to it.

The boy had no kith or kin—which is most unusual for a Welshman—and so, except in our office, he seemed to be forgotten. A month went by, the season changed, and changed again, and a year was gone, when the Government

sent word to Larmy—whom the boy seemed to have named for his next friend—that David's body would be brought back for burial if his friends desired it. So in the fall of 1900, when the Presidential campaign was at its height, the conquering hero came home, and we gave him a military funeral. The body came to us on Labor Day, and in our office we consecrated the day to David. The band and the militia company took him from the big stone church where sometimes he had gone to Sunday-school as a child, and a long procession of townsfolk wound around the hill to the cemetery, where David received a salute of guns, and the bugler played taps, and our eyes grew wet and our hearts were touched. Then we covered him with flowers, whipped up the horses and came back to the world.

That night, as it was at the end of a holiday, the Republican Committee had assigned to our town, for the benefit of the men in the shops, one of the picture-shows that Mark Hanna, like a heathen in his blindness, had sent to Kansas, thinking our State, after the war, needed a spur to its patriotism in the election.

The crowd in front of the post-office was a hundred feet wide and two hundred feet long, looking at the pictures from the kinetoscope—pictures of men going to work in mills and factories; pictures of the troops unloading on the coast of Cuba; pictures of the big warships sailing by; pictures of Dewey's flagship coming up the Hudson to its glory; pictures of the Spanish ships lying crushed in Manila harbour.

Larmy and the reporter were sitting kicking their heels on the stone steps of the post-office opposite the screen on which the pictures were flickering. Some they saw and others they did not notice, for their talk was of David and of the strange things he had shown to them.

"How did you ever fix it up in your mind?" asked Larmy.

"I didn't fix it up. He was too many for me," was the reporter's answer.

"The little rooster couldn't have faked it up?" questioned Larmy.

"No—but he might have hypnotised us—or something."

"Yes—but still, he might have been hypnotised by something himself," suggested

Larmy, and then added: "That thing he did with the linotype—say, wasn't that about the limit? And yet nothing has come of that prophecy. That's the trouble. I've seen dozens of those things, and they always just come up to the edge of proving themselves, but always jump back. There is always——"

"My God, Larmy, look—look!" cried the reporter.

And the two men looked at the screen before them, just as the backward sway of the crowd had ceased and horror was finding a gasping voice upon the lips of the women; for there, walking as naturally as life, out of the background of the picture, came David Lewis with his dark sleeves rolled up, his peaked army hat on the back of his head, a bucket in his hand, and as he stopped and grinned at the crowd—between the lightning-flashes of the kinetoscope—they could see him wave his free hand. He stood there while a laugh covered his features, and he put his hand in his pocket and drew out a key-ring, which he waved, holding it by some long, stemlike instrument. Then he snapped back into nothing.

And the operator of the machine, being in a hurry to catch the ten-thirty train, went on with his picture-show and gave us President McKinley and Mark Hanna sitting on the front steps of the home in Canton, then followed the photograph of the party around the big table signing the treaty of peace. As the crowd loosened and dissolved, Larmy and the reporter stood silently waiting. Then, when they could get away together, the reporter said:

"Come, let's go over to the shop and think about this thing."

When they opened the office door, the rank odour of the machinery came to them with sickening force. They left the front door open and raised the windows. The reporter began using a chisel on the top of a little box with a Government frank on it, that had been placed upon the music-box in the corner.

"We may as well see what David sent home," he grunted, as he jerked at the stubborn nails, "anyway, I've got a theory."

Larmy was smoking hard. "Yes," he replied after a time; "we might as well open it now as any time. The letter said all his things would

be found there. I guess he didn't have a great deal. Poor little devil, there was no one much to get things for but you fellows and maybe me, if he thought of us."

By this time the box was opened, and the reporter was scooping things out upon the floor. There was an army uniform, that had something clinky in the pockets, and wrapped in a magenta silk handkerchief was a carved piece of ivory. In a camera plate-box was a rose, faded and crumbly, a chip-diamond ring, a bangle bracelet, a woman's glove and a photograph. These Larmy looked at as he smoked. They meant nothing to him, but the reporter dived into the clothes for the clinky things. He came up with a bunch of keys, and on it was the long brass lever which unlocked the music in the box.

"Here," he said as he jingled the keys, "is the last link in our chain." And he rose and went over to the box, uncovered it, and jabbed in the lever with a nervous hand. There was a rolling and clinking inside. Then, slowly, a harmony rose, and the tinkling that came from the box resolved itself into a melody that filled

the room. It was strong and clear and powerful, and seemed to have a certain passion in it that may have been struck like flint fire from the time and the place and the spirit of the occasion. The two men stared dumbly as they listened. The sound rose stronger and stronger; over and over again the song repeated itself; then very gently its strength began to fail; and finally it sank into a ghostly tinkle that still carried the melody till it faded into silence.

"That," said the reporter, "is the song that was in his heart—'Love's Golden Dream.' I'm satisfied."

'The last link," shuddered Larmy. "That which seemed corporeal has melted 'as a breath into the wind.'"

The reporter shovelled the debris into the box, pushed it under a desk, and the two men hurried to close the office. As they stood on the threshold a moment, while the reporter clicked the key in the lock, a paper rustled and they heard a mouse scamper across the floor inside the empty room.

"Let's go home," shivered Larmy. They started north, which was the short way home,

but Larmy took hold of his companion's arm and said: "No, let's go this way: there's an electric light here on the corner, and it's dark down there."

And so they turned into the white, sputtering glare and walked on without words.

V

The Coming of the Leisure Class

WE all are workers in our town, as people are in every small town. It is always proper to ask what a man does for a living with us, for none of us has money enough to live without work, and until the advent of Beverly Amidon, our leisure class consisted of Red Martin, the gambler, the only man in town with nothing to do in the middle of the day; and the black boys who loafed on the south side of the bank building through the long afternoons until it was time to deliver the clothes which their wives and mothers had washed. Everyone else in town works, and, excepting an occasional picnic, there is no social activity among the men until after sundown. But five years ago Beverly Amidon came to town, and brought with him a large leisure and a taste for society which made him easily the "glass of fashion and the mould of form" not only in our little community, but all over this part



nd brought with him a large leisure and a taste for society

of the State. Beverly and his mother, who had come to make their home with her sister, in one of the big houses on the hill, had money. How much, we had no idea. In a small town when one has "money" no one knows just how much or how little, but it must be over fifteen thousand dollars, otherwise one is merely "well fixed."

But Beverly was a blessing to our office. We never could have filled the society column Saturday without him, for he was a continuous social performance. He was the first man in town who dared to wear a flannel tennis suit on the streets, and he was a whole year ahead of the other boys with his Panama hat. It was one of those broad-brimmed Panamas, full of heart-interest, that made him look like a romantic barytone, and when under that gala façade he came tripping into the office in his white duck clothes, with a wide Windsor tie, Miss Larrabee, the society editor, who was the only one of us with whom he ever had any business, would pull the string that unhooked the latch of the gate to her section of the room and say, without looking up: "Come into the garden, Maud." To which he made

invariable reply: "Oh, Miss Larrabee, don't be so sarcastic! I have a little item for you."

The little item was always an account of one of his social triumphs. And there was a long list of them to his credit. He introduced ping-pong; he gave us our first "pit party"; he held the first barn dance given in the county; his was our first "tacky party"; and he gave the first progressive buggy ride the young people had ever enjoyed, and seven girls afterward confessed that on the evening of that affair he hadn't been in the buggy with them five minutes before he began driving with one hand—and his right hand at that. Still, when the crowd assembled for supper at Flat Rock, the girls didn't hold his left handiwork against him, and they admitted that he was just killing when he put on one of their hats and gave an imitation of a girl from Bethany College who had been visiting in town the week before. Beverly was always the life of the company. He could make three kinds of salad dressing, two kinds of lobster Newburgh and four Welsh rarebits, and was often the sole guest of honour at the afternoon meetings of the T. T. T. girls, before whom he

was always willing to show his prowess. Sometimes he gave chafing-dish parties whereat he served ginger ale and was real devilish.

He used to ride around the country bareheaded with two or three girls when honest men were at work, and he acquired a fine leather-coloured tan. He tried organising a polo club, but the ponies from the delivery waggons that were available after six o'clock did not take training well, and he gave up polo. In making horseback riding a social diversion he taught a lot of fine old family buggy horses a number of mincing steps, so that thereafter they were impossible in the family phaeton. He thereby became unpopular with a number of the heads of families, and he had to introduce bridge whist in the old married set to regain their favour. This cost him the goodwill of the preachers, and he gave a Japanese garden party for the Epworth League to restore himself in the church where he was accustomed to pass the plate on Sundays. Miss Larrabee used to call him the first aid to the ennuied. But the Young Prince, who chased runaways teams and wrote personal items, never referred to him except as " Queen of the Hand-

holders." For fun we once printed Beverly Amidon's name among those present at a Mothers' League meeting, and it was almost as much of a hit in the town as the time we put the words, "light refreshments were served and the evening was spent in cards and dancing," at the close of an account of a social meeting of the Ministerial Alliance.

The next time Beverly brought in his little item he stopped long enough to tell us that he thought that the people who laughed at our obvious mistake in the list of guests of the Mothers' League were rather coarse. One word brought on two, and as it was late in the afternoon, and the paper was out, we bade Beverly sit down and tell us the story of his life, and his real name; for Miss Larrabee had declared a dozen times that Beverly Amidon sounded so much like a stage name that she was willing to bet that his real name was Jabez Skaggs.

Beverly's greatest joy was in talking about his social conquests in Tiffin, Ohio; therefore he soon was telling us that there was so much culture in Tiffin, such a jolly lot of girls, so many pleasant homes, and a most extraordinary at-

mosphere of refinement. He rattled along, telling us what great sport they used to have running down to Cleveland for theatre-parties, and how easy it was to 'phone to Toledo and get the nicest crowd of boys one could wish to come over to the parties, and how Tiffin was famous all over that part of Ohio for its exclusive families and its week-end house-parties.

The Young Prince sat by listening for a time and then got up and leaned over the railing around Miss Larrabee's desk. Beverly was confiding to us how he got up the sweetest living pictures you ever saw and took them down to Cleveland, where they made all kinds of money for the King's Daughters. He told what gorgeous costumes the girls wore and what stunning backgrounds he rigged up. The Young Prince winked at Miss Larrabee as he straightened up and started for the door. Then he let fly: "Were you Psyche at the Pool in that show, or a Mellin's Food Baby?"

But Beverly deigned no reply and a little later in the conversation remarked that the young men in this town were very bad form. He thought that he had seen some who were certainly not

gentlemen. He really didn't see how the young ladies could endure to have such persons in their set. He confided to Miss Larrabee that at a recent lawn-party he had come upon a young man, who should be nameless, with his arm about a young woman's waist.

"And, Miss Larrabee," continued Beverly in his solemnest tones, "A young man who will put his arm around a girl will go further—yes, Miss Larabee—much further. He will kiss her!" Whereat he nodded his head and shook it at the awful thought.

Miss Larrabee drew in a shocked breath and gasped:

"Do you really think so, Mr. Amidon? I couldn't imagine such a thing!"

He had a most bedizened college fraternity pin, which he was forever lending to the girls. During his first year in town, Miss Larrabee told us, at least a dozen girls had worn the thing. Wherefore she used to call it the Amidon Loan Exhibit.

He introduced golf into our town, and was able to find six men to join his fifteen young ladies in the ancient sport. Two preachers, a

young dentist and three college professors were the only male creatures who dared walk across our town in plaid stockings and knickerbockers, and certainly it hurt their standing at the banks, for the town frowned on golf, and confined its sport to baseball in the summer, football in the autumn, and checkers in the winter.

That was a year ago. In the autumn something happened to Beverly, and he had to go to work. There was nothing in our little town for him, so he went to Kansas City. He did not seem to "make it" socially there, for he wrote to the girls that Kansas City was cold and distant and that everything was ruled by money. He explained that there were some nice people, but they did not belong to the fast set. He was positively shocked, he wrote, at what he heard of the doings at the Country Club—so different from the way things went in Tiffin, Ohio.

For a long time we did not hear his name mentioned in the office. Finally there came a letter addressed to Miss Larrabee. In it Beverly said that he had found his affinity. "She is not rich," he admitted, "but," he added, "she belongs to an old, aristocratic, Southern family, through re-

duced circumstances living in retirement; very exclusive, very haughty. I have counted it a privilege to be constantly associated with people of such rare distinction. Her mother is a grand dame of the old school who has opened her home to a few choice paid guests who feel, as I do, that it is far more refreshing socially to partake of the gracious hospitality of her secluded home than to live in the noisy, vulgar hotels of the city. It was in this relation at her mother's home that I met the woman who is to join her lot with mine." Thereafter followed the date and place of the wedding, a description of the bride's dress, an account of her lineage back to the "Revolutionary Georgia Governor of that name," and fifty cents in stamps for extra papers containing an account of the wedding.

In time we hope to teach our young men to roll down their shirt-sleeves in the summer, our girls to wear their hats, our horses to quit prancing in the shafts of the family buggy. In time bridge whist will wear itself out, in time our social life will resume its old estate, and the owners of the five dress-suits in town will return to their former distinction. In time caste lines

set by the advent of the leisure class will be obliterated, and it will be no longer bad form for the dry-goods clerk to dance with the grocery clerk's wife at the Charity Ball. But, come what may, we shall always know that there was a time in the social history of our town when we danced the two-step as they dance it in Tiffin, Ohio, and wore knee-breeches and plaid stockings, and quit work at four o'clock. Those were great days—"the glory that was Greece, the grandeur that was Rome."

VI

The Bolton Girl's "Position"

WHEN she said she would like to "accept a position" with our paper, it was all over between us. After that we knew that she was at least highly improbable if not entirely impossible. But then we might have expected as much from a girl who called herself Maybelle. There is, however, this much to be said in Maybelle's favour: she was persistent. She did not let go till it thundered! We could have stood it well enough if she had limited her campaign for a job on the paper to an occasional call at the office. But she had a fiendish instinct which told her who were the friends we liked most to oblige: the banker, for instance, who carried our overdrafts, the leading advertiser, the chairman of the printing committee of the town council—and she found ways to make them ask if we couldn't do something for Miss Bolton. She could teach school; indeed, she had a place in

the Academy. But she loathed school-teaching. She had always felt that, if she could once get a start, she could make a name for herself.

She had written something that she called "A Critique on Hamlet," which she submitted to us, and was deeply pained when we told her that we didn't care for editorial matter; that what our paper needed was the names of the people in our own country town and county, printed as many times a day or a week or a month as they could be put into type. We tried to tell her that more important to us than the influence of the Celtic element on our national life and literature was the fact that John Jones of Lebo—that is to say, red John, as distinguished from black John—or Jones the tinner, or Jones of the Possum Holler settlement was in town with a load of hay. "Other papers," we explained carefully, while she looked as sympathetic and intelligent as a collie, "other papers might be interested in the radio-activity of uranium X; they might care to print articles on the psychological phenomena of mobs"—to which she snapped eager agreement with her

eyes—" others, with entire propriety, might be interested in inorganic evolution "—and she cheeped " yes, yes " with feverish intensity—" but in our little local paper we cared only for the person who could tell our readers with the most delicacy and precision how many spoons Mrs. Worthington had to borrow for her party, who had the largest number of finger-bowls in town, what Mrs. Conklin paid for the broilers she served at her party last February, and the name of the country woman who raised them, and why it was that all the women failed to make Jennie's recipe for sunshine cake work when they tried it." Such are the things that interest our people, and he, she or it who can turn in two or three colums a day of items setting forth these things in a good-natured way, so that the persons mentioned will only grin and wonder who told it, is good for ten dollars of our money every Saturday night.

Maybelle thought it was such interesting work, and her eyes floated in tears of happiness at the thought of such joy. If she could only have a chance! It would be just lovely—simply grand, and she knew she could do it!



)ometimes he thought it was a report of a fire and at other times it seemed like a dress-goods catalogue

Something in her innermost soul thrilled with a tintinabulation that made her quiver with anticipation. Whereupon she went out and came back in three days with five sheets of foolscap on which she had written an article beginning: "When Memory draws aside the curtains of her magic chamber, revealing the pictures meditation paints, and we see through the windows of our dreams the sweet vale of yesterday, lying outside and beyond; when stern Ambition, with relentless hand, turns us away from all this to ride in the sombre chariot of Duty—then it is that entrancing Pleasure beckons us back to sit by Memory's fire and sip our tea with Maiden meditation." What it was all about no one ever found out; but the Young Prince at the local desk who read it clear through said that sometimes he thought that it was a report of a fire and at other times it seemed like a dress-goods catalogue. It would have made four columns. As he put the roll back in the drawer the Young Prince rose and paced grandly out. At the front door he stopped and said: "You'll never make anything out of her—she's a handholder! When a girl begins to get

corns on her hands, I notice she has mush on the brain!"

But Maybelle returned, and we went all over the same ground again. We explained that what we wanted was short items—two or three lines each—little references to home doings; something telling who has company, who is sick, who is putting shingles on the barn or an "L" on the house. And she said "Oh, yes!" so passionately that it seemed as though she would bark or put her front feet on the table. One felt like taking her jaws in his hands and pulling her ears.

The next time she came in she said that if we would just try her—give her something to do—she was sure she could show us how well she could do it. On a venture, and partly to get rid of her, we sent her to the district convention of the Epworth League to write up the opening meeting. About noon of the next day she brought in three sermons, and said that she didn't get the list of officers nor the names of the choir because they were all people who lived here and everyone knew them. Then we explained in short, simple sentences that the ser-

mons were of no value, and that the names were what we desired. She dropped her eyes and said meekly "Oh!" and told us how sorry she was. Also she said that if it wasn't for a meeting of the T. T. T. girls that afternoon she would go back and get the names. When she went out, the Young Prince, sitting by the window with his pencil behind his ear and his feet on the table, said: "I bet she can make the grandest fudge!" "And such lovely angel food," put in Miss Larrabee, who was busy writing up the Epworth League convention.

Miss Bolton's name was always among the lists we printed of the guests at the Entre Nous Card Club, the Imperial Dancing Club, the "Giddy Young Things" Club, the Art Club and the Shakespeare Club. But when she came to the office she was full of anxiety at the frivolity of society. She said that she so longed for intellectual companionship that she felt sometimes as if she must fly to a place where she could find a soul that would feel in unison with the infinite that thrilled her being. Far be it from her to wish to coin the pulsations of her soul, but papa and mamma did need her help so.

She accented papa and mamma on the last syllable and leaned forward and looked upward like a shirtwaist Madonna. But writing locals someway didn't appeal to her. She wondered if we could use a serial story. And then she went on: "Oh, I have some of the sweetest things in my head! I know I could write them. They just tingle through my blood like wine. I know I could write them—such sublime things—but when I sit down to put them on paper something always comes up that prevents my going on with them. There are dozens whirling through my brain begging to be written. There is one about the earl who has imprisoned the young princess in a dungeon, and her lover, a knight of the cross, comes home from a crusade and is put in the cell next to her. A bird that she has been feeding through her prison window takes a lock of her golden hair to the window where her lover is looking out across the beautiful world, not knowing that she, too, has fallen into the earl's clutches. And, oh, yes! there is another about Cornelia who lived in a moated tower, and all the dukes and lords and kings in the land had laid suit to her hand,

and she could find none who came up to her highest ideal, so she set them a task—and, oh, a lot more about what they did; I haven't thought that out—but anyway she married the red duke Wolfang who spurned her task and took her by night with his retainers away from the tower, saying her love was his Holy Grail and to get her was the object of his pilgrimage. Oh, it's just grand."

No, we don't use serials and when we do we buy them in stereotyped plates by the pound. This made Miss Bolton droop, with another disappointed "Oh." The grain of the world seems so coarse when one looks at it closely.

We did not see Miss Bolton at the office for a long time after the duke abducted the lady in the moated grange, but we received a poem signed M. B. "To Dan Cupid," and another on "My Heart of Fire." Also there came an anonymous communication in strangely familiar fat vertical handwriting to the effect that "some people in this town think that if a young lady has a gentleman friend call on her more than twice a week it is their business to assume a courtship.

They should know that there are souls on this earth whose tendrils reach into the infinite beyond the gross materiality of this mundane sphere to a destiny beyond the stars." At the bottom of the page were the words: "Please publish and oblige a subscriber."

The next that we heard of Miss Bolton was that she was running pink and blue baby-ribbon through her white things, and was expecting a linen shower from the T. T. T. girls, a silver shower from the "Giddy Young Things," a handkerchief shower from the Entre Nous girls, and a kitchen shower from the Imperial Club. Miss Larrabee, the society editor, began to hate Miss Bolton with the white-hot hate which all society editors turn on all brides. Miss Larrabee was authority for the statement that Maybelle had used five hundred yards of baby-ribbon—pink and blue and white and yellow—in her trousseau, and that she was bestowing the same passionate fervour on her hemstitching and tucking that she had wasted on literature; that she was helping papa and mamma by shouldering the biggest wedding on them since the Tomlinsons went into bankruptcy after their firework

ceremonial. Miss Larrabee said that Papa Bolton's livery-stable was burning up so fast that she wanted to call out the fire department, and that Mamma Bolton made her think of the patent-medicine testimonials we printed from "poor tired women."

The day of the wedding the blow came. A very starched-up little boy with strawberry juice frescoed around his mouth brought in a note from Maybelle and a tightly-rolled manuscript tied with blue baby-ribbon. In the note she said that she thought it would be so romantic to "write up her own wedding—recalling the dear, dead days when she was a neophyte in letters." We handed the manuscript to Miss Larrabee, from whom, as she read, came snorts: "'Drawing-room!' Huh! 'Music-room.' Heavens to Betsy! 'Peculiar style of beauty!' Oh, joy! 'Looked like a wood-nymph in the morn.' Wouldn't that saturate you! 'The Apollo-like beauty of the groom.'" Miss Larrabee groaned as she rose, and putting her raincoat on the floor by her chair she exclaimed: "Do you people know what I am going to do? I have got to lie right down here and have a fit!"

VII

"By the Rod of His Wrath"

SATURDAY afternoons, when the town is full, and farmers are coming in to the office to pay their subscriptions for the *Weekly*, it is our habit, after the paper is out, to sit in the office and look over Main Street, where perhaps five hundred people are milling, and consider with one another the nature of our particular little can of angle-worms and its relation to the great forces that move the world. The town often seems to us to be dismembered from the earth, and to be a chunk of humanity drifting through space by itself, like a vagrant star, forgotten of the law that governs the universe. Go where our people will, they find change; but when they come home, they look out of the hack as they ride through town, seeing the old familiar buildings and bill-boards and street-signs, and say with surprise, as Mathew Boris said after a busy and eventful day in Kansas City, where he had

been marketing his steers: "Well, the old town seems to keep right on, just the same."

The old men in town seem always to have been old, and though the middle-aged do sometimes step across the old-age line, the young men remain perennially young, and when they grow fat or dry up, and their hair thins and whitens, they are still called by their diminutive names, and to most of us they are known as sons of the old men. Here a new house goes up, and there a new store is built, but they rise slowly, and everyone in town has time to go through them and over them and criticise the architectural taste of the builders, so that by the time a building is finished it seems to have grown into the original consciousness of the people, and to be a part of their earliest memories. We send our children to Sunday-school, and we go to church and learn how God's rewards or punishments fell upon the men of old, as they were faithful or recreant; but we don't seem to be like the men of old, for we are neither very good nor very bad—hardly worth God's while to sort us over for any uncommon lot. Only once, in the case of John Markley, did the Lord

reach into our town and show His righteous judgment. And that judgment was shown so clearly through the hearts of our people that very likely John Markley does not consider it the judgment of God at all, but the prejudice of the neighbours.

When we have been talking over the case of John Markley in the office we have generally ended by wondering whether God—or whatever one cares to call the force that operates the moral laws, as well as those that in our ignorance we set apart as the physical laws of the world—whether God moves by cataclysm and accidents, or whether He moves with blessing or chastisement, through human nature as it is, in the ordinary business of the lives of men. But we have never settled that in our office any more than they have in the great schools, and as John Markley, game to the end, has never said what he thought of the town's treatment of him, it will never be known which side of our controversy is right.

Years ago, perhaps as long ago as the drought of seventy-four, men began calling him "Honest John Markley." He was the fairest

man in town, and he made money by it, for when he opened his little bank Centennial year, which was the year of the big wheat crop, farmers stood in line half an hour at a time, at the door of his bank, waiting to give him their money. He was a plain, uncollared, short-whiskered man, brown-haired and grey-eyed, whose wife always made his shirts and, being a famous cook in town, kept him round and chubby. He referred to her as "Ma," and she called him "Pa Markley" so insistently that when we elected him State Senator, after he made his bank a National bank, in 1880, the town and county couldn't get used to calling him Senator Markley, so "Pa Markley" it was until after his Senatorial fame had been forgotten. Their children had grown up and left home before the boom of the eighties came—one girl went to California and the boy to South America; —and when John Markley began to write his wealth in six figures—which is almost beyond the dreams of avarice in a town like ours—he and his wife were lonely and knew little what to do with their income.

They bought new furniture for the parlour,

and the Ladies' Missionary Society of the First Methodist Church, the only souls that saw it with the linen jackets off, say it was lovely to behold; they bought everything the fruit-tree man had in his catalogue, and their five acres on Exchange Street were pimpled over with shrubs that never bloomed and with trees that never bore fruit. He passed the hat in church—being a brother-in-law to the organisation, as he explained; sang "Tramp, Tramp, Tramp, the Boys Are Marching" at Grand Army entertainments, and always as an encore dragged "Ma" out to sing with him "Dear, Dear, What Can the Matter Be." She was a skinny, sharp-eyed, shy little woman in her late fifties when the trouble came. She rose at every annual meeting of the church to give a hundred dollars but her voice never lasted until she got through announcing her donation, and she sat down demurely, blushing and looking down her nose as though she had disgraced the family. She had lost a brother in the war, and never came further out of mourning than purple flowers in her bonnet. She bought John Markley's clothes, so that his Sunday finery contained nothing giddier

than a grey made-up tie, that she pinned around the collars which her own hands had ironed.

Slowly as their fortune piled up, and people said they had a million, his brown beard grizzled a little, and his brow crept up and up and his girth stretched out to forty-four. But his hands did not whiten or soften, and though he was "Honest John," and every quarter-section of land that he bought doubled in value by some magic that he only seemed to know, he kept the habits of his youth, rose early, washed at the kitchen basin, and was the first man at his office in the morning. At night, after a hard day's work he smoked a cob-pipe in the basement, where he could spit into the furnace and watch the fire until nine o'clock, when he put out the cat and bedded down the fire, while "Ma" set the buckwheat cakes. They never had a servant in their house.

We used to see John Markley pass the office window a dozen times a day, a hale, vigorous man, whose heels clicked hard on the sidewalk as he came hurrying along—head back and shoulders rolling. He was a powerful, masculine, indomitable creature, who looked out of

defiant, cold, unblinking eyes as though he were just about to tell the whole world to go to hell! The town was proud of him. He was our "prominent citizen," and when he was elected president of the district bankers' association, and his name appeared in the papers as a possible candidate for United States Senator or Minister to Mexico or Secretary of the Interior, we were glad that "Honest John Markley" was our fellow-townsman.

And then came the crash. Man is a curious creature, and, even if he is nine parts good, the old Adam in him must burn out one way or another in his youth, or there comes a danger period at the height of his middle life when his submerged tenth that has been smouldering for years flares up and destroys him. Wherefore the problem which we have never been able to solve, though we have talked it over in the office a dozen times: whether John Markley had begun to feel, before he met the Hobart woman, that he wasn't getting enough out of life for the money he had invested in it; or whether she put the notion in his head.

It is scarcely correct to speak of his having

met her, for she grew up in the town, and had been working for the Markley Mortgage and Investment Company for half-a-dozen years before he began to notice her. From a brassy street-gadding child of twelve, whose mother crowded her into grown-up society before she left the high school, and let her spell her name Ysabelle, she had grown into womanhood like a rank weed; had married at nineteen, was divorced at twenty-one, and having tried music teaching and failed, china painting and failed, she learned stenography by sheer force of her own will, with no instruction save that in her book, and opened an office for such work as she could get, while aiming for the best job in town—the position of cashier and stenographer for the Markley Mortgage Company. It took her three years to get in and another year to make herself invaluable. She was big and strong, did the work of two men for the pay of one, and for five years John Markley, who saw that she had plenty of work to do, did not seem to know that she was on earth. But one day "Alphabetical" Morrison, who was in our office picking up his bundle of exchanges, looked rather idly out of

the window, and suddenly rested his roving eyes upon John Markley and Mrs. Hobart, standing and talking in front of the post office. The man at the desk near Morrison happened to be looking out at that moment, and he, too, saw what Morrison saw—which was nothing at all, except a man standing beside a woman. Probably the pair had met in exactly the same place at exactly the same time, and had exchanged an idle word daily for five years, and no one had noticed it, but that day Morrison unconsciously put his hand to his chin and scratched his jaw, and his eyes and the man's at the desk beside him met in a surprised interrogation, and Morrison's mouth and nose twitched, and the other man said, as he turned his face into his work, "Well, wouldn't that get you!"

The conversation went no further. Neither could have said what he saw. But there is something in every human creature—a survival of our jungle days, which lets our eyes see more than our consciousness records in language. And these men, who saw Markley and the woman, could not have defined the canine im-

pression which he gave them. Yet it was there. The volcano was beginning to smoke.

It was a month later before the town saw the flames. During that time John Markley had been walking to and from his midday dinner with Isabel Hobart, had been helping her on and off with her wraps in the office, and had been all but kicking up the dirt behind him and barking around her, as the clerks there told us, without causing comment. An honest man always has such a long start when he runs away from himself that no one misses him until he is beyond extradition. Matters went along thus for nearly a year before the woman in the cottage on Exchange Street knew how they stood. And that speaks well of our town; for we are not a mean town, and if anyone ever had our sympathy it was Mrs. Markley, as she went about her quiet ways, giving her missionary teas, looking after the poor of her church, making her famous doughnuts for the socials, doing her part at the Relief Corps chicken-pie suppers, digging her club paper out of the encyclopædia, and making over her black silk the third time for every day. If John Markley was cross

with her in that time—and the neighbours say that he was; if he sat for hours in the house without saying a word, and grumbled and flew into a rage at the least ruffling of the domestic waters—his wife kept her grief to herself, and even when she left town to visit her daughter in California no one knew what she knew.

A month passed, two months passed, and John Markley's name had become a byword and a hissing. Three months passed, a year went by, and still the wife did not return. And then one day Ab Handy, who sometimes prepared John Markley's abstracts, came into our office and whispered to the man at the desk that there was a little paper filed in the court which, under the circumstances, Mr. Markley would rather we would say as little about as is consistent with our policy in such cases. Handy didn't say what it was, and backed out bowing and eating dirt, and we sent a boy hot-foot to the court-house to find out what had been filed. The boy came back with a copy of a petition for divorce that had been entered by John Markley, alleging desertion. John Markley did not face the town when he brought his suit, but left for

Chicago on the afternoon train, and was gone nearly a month. The broken little woman did not come back to contest the case, and the divorce was granted.

The day before his marriage to Isabel Hobart, John Markley shaved off his grizzled brown beard, and showed the town a face so strong and cunning and brutal that men were shocked; they said that she wished to make him appear young, and the shave did drop ten years from his countenance; but it uncovered his soul so shamelessly that it seemed immodest to look at his face. Upon the return from the wedding trip, the employees of the Markley Mortgage Company, at John Markley's suggestion, gave a reception for the bride and groom, and the Lord laid the first visible stripe on John Markley while he stood with his bride for three hours, waiting for the thousand invited guests who never came. "Alphabetical" Morrison, who owed John Markley money, and had to go, told us in the office the next day that John Markley in evening clothes, with his great paunch swathed in a white silk vest, smirking like a gorged jackal, showing his fellow-towns-

men for the first time his coarse, yellow teeth and his thin, cruel lips, looked like some horrible cartoon of his former self. Colonel Morrison did not describe the bride, but she passed our office that day, going the rounds of the dry goods stores, giggling with the men clerks—a picture of sin that made men wet their lips. She was big, oversexed, and feline; rattling in silks, with an aura of sensuousness around her which seemed to glow like a coal, without a flicker of kindness or shame or sweetness, and which all the town knew instinctively must clinker into something black and ugly as the years went by.

So the threshold of the cottage on Exchange Street was not darkened by our people. And when the big house went up—a palace for a country town, though it only cost John Markley $25,000—he, who had been so reticent about his affairs in other years, tried to talk to his old friends of the house, telling them expansively that he was putting it up so that the town would have something in the way of a house for public gatherings; but he aroused no responsive enthusiasm, and long before the big

opening reception his fervour had been quenched. Though we are a curious people, and though we all were anxious to know how the inside of the new house looked, we did not go to the reception; only the socially impossible, and the travelling men's wives at the Metropole, whom Mrs. Markley had met when she was boarding during the week they moved, gathered to hear the orchestra from Kansas City, to eat the Topeka caterer's food, and to fall down on the newly-waxed floors of the Markley mansion. But our professional instinct at the office told us that the town was eager for news of that house, and we took three columns to write up the reception. Our description of the place began with the swimming-pool in the cellar and ended with the ballroom in the third story.

It took John Markley a long time to realise that the town was done with him, for there was no uprising, no demonstration, just a gradual loosening of his hold upon the community. In other years his neighbours had urged him and expected him to serve on the school-board, of which he had been chairman for a dozen years, but the spring that the big house was opened

Mrs. Julia Worthington was elected in his place. At the June meeting of the Methodist Conference a new director was chosen to fill John Markley's place on the college board, and when he cancelled his annual subscription no one came to ask him to renew it. In the fall his party selected a new ward committeeman, and though Markley had been treasurer of the committee for a dozen years, his successor was named from the Worthington bank, and they had the grace not to come to Markley with the subscription-paper asking for money. It took some time for the sense of the situation to penetrate John Markley's thick skin; whereupon the fight began in earnest, and men around town said that John Markley had knocked the lid off his barrel. He doubled his donation to the county campaign fund; he crowded himself at the head of every subscription-paper; and frequently he brought us communications to print, offering to give as much money himself for the library, or the Provident Association, or the Y. M. C. A., as the rest of the town would subscribe combined. He mended church roofs under which he never had sat;

he bought church bells whose calls he never heeded; and paid the greater part of the pipe-organ debts in two stone churches. Colonel Morrison remarked in the office one day that John Markley was raising the price of popular esteem so high that none but the rich could afford it. "But," chuckled the Colonel, "I notice old John hasn't got a corner on it yet, and he doesn't seem to have all he needs for his own use." The wrench that had torn open his treasure-chest, had also loosened John Markley's hard face, and he had begun to smile. He became as affable as a man may who has lived for fifty years silent and self-contained. He beamed upon his old friends, and once or twice a week he went the rounds of the stores making small purchases, to let the clerks bask in his sunlight.

If a new preacher came to town the Markleys went to his church, and Mrs. Markley tried to be the first woman to call on his wife.

All the noted campaign speakers assigned to our town were invited to be the Markleys' guests, and Mrs. Markley sent her husband, red necktied, high-hatted and tailor-made, to the train to meet the distinguished guest. If the

man was as much as a United States Senator, Markley hired the band, and in an open hack rode in solemn state with his prize through the town behind the tinkling cymbals, and then, with much punctility, took the statesman up and down Main Street afoot, into all the stores and offices, introducing him to the common people. At such times John Markley was the soul of cordiality; he seemed hungry for a kind look and a pleasant word with his old friends. About this time his defiant eyes began to lose their boring points, and to wander and hunt for something they had lost. When we had a State convention of the dominant party, the Markleys saw to it that the Governor and all the important people attending, with their wives, stopped in the big house. The Markleys gave receptions to them, which the men in our town dared not ignore, but sent their wives away visiting and went alone. This familiarity with politicians probably gave the Markleys the idea that they might help their status in the community if John Markley ran for Governor. He announced his candidacy, and the Kansas City papers, which did not appreciate the local situation, spoke well

of him; but his boom died in the first month, when some of his old friends called at the back room of the bank to tell him that the Democrats would air his family affairs if he made another move. He looked up pitiably into Ab Handy's face when the men were done talking and said: "Don't you suppose they'll ever quit? Ain't they no statute of limitation?" And then he arose and stood by his desk with one arm akimbo and his other hand at his temple as he sighed: "Oh hell, Ab—what's the use? Tell 'em I'm out of it!"

Mrs. Markley seems to have shut him out of the G. A. R., thinking maybe that the old boys and their wives were not of her social level, or perhaps she had some idea of playing even with them, because their wives had not recognised her; but she shut away much of her husband's social comfort when she barred his comrades, and they in turn grew harder toward him than they were at first. As the Markleys entered their second year, Mrs. Markley alone in the big house, with only the new people from the hotel to eat her dinners, and with only the beer-drinking crowd from the West Side to dance in the

attic ballroom, had much time to think, and she bethought her of the lecturers who were upon the college lecture course, whereupon John Markley had to carve for authors and explorers, and an occasional Senator or Congressman, who, after a hard evening's work on the platform, paid for his dinner and lodging by sitting up on a gilded high-backed and uncomfortable chair in the stately reception-room of the Markley home, talking John Markley into a snore, before Isabel let them go to bed. Isabel sent the accounts of these affairs to the office for us to print, with the lists of invited guests, who never accepted. And the town grinned.

At the end of two years John Markley's fat wit told him that it was a losing fight. He had been dropped from the head of the Merchants' Association; he was cut off from the executive committee of the Fair; he was not asked to serve on the railroad committee. His old friends, whom he asked over to spend the evening at his house, always had good excuses, which they gave him later over the telephone, and their wives, who used to call him by his first name, scarcely recognised him on the street. He quit

coming to our office with pieces for the paper telling the town his views on this or that local matter; and gradually gave up the fight for his old place on the school board.

The clerks in the Markley Mortgage Company office say that he fell into a moody way, and would come to the office and refuse to speak to anyone for hours. Also, as the big house often glowed until midnight for a dance of the socially impossible who used the Markley ballroom, rent free, as a convenience, John Markley grew to have a sleepy look by day, and lines came into his red, shaved face. He grew anxious about his health, and a hundred worries tightened his belt and shook his great fat hand, just the least in the world, and when through some gossip that his wife brought him from the kitchen he felt the scorn of an old friend burn his soul like a caustic, for many days he would brood over it. Finally care began to chisel down his flinty face, to cut the fat from his bull neck, so that the cords stood out, and, through staring in impotent rage and pain at the ceiling in the darkness of the night, red rims began to worm around his eyes. He was not sixty

years old then, and he had lashed himself into seventy.

However his money-cunning did not grow dull. He kept his golden touch and his impotent dollars piled higher and higher. The pile must have mocked Isabel Markley, for it could bring her nothing that she wanted. She stopped trying to give big parties and receptions. Her social efforts tapered down to little dinners for the new people in town. But as the dinner hour grew near she raged—so the servants said—whenever the telephone rang, and in the end she had to give up even the dinner scheme.

So there came a time when they began to take trips to the seashore and the mountains, flitting from hotel to hotel. In the office we knew when they changed quarters, for at each resort John Markley would see the reporters and give out a long interview, which was generally prefaced by the statement that he was a prominent Western capitalist, who had refused the nomination for Governor or for Senator, or for whatever Isabel Markley happened to think of; and papers containing these interviews, marked in green ink, came addressed to



As the dinner hour grew near she raged—so the servants said—whenever the telephone rang

the office in her stylish, angular hand. During grand opera season one might see the Markleys hanging about the great hotels of Chicago or Kansas City, he a tired, sleepy-faced, prematurely old man, who seemed to be counting the hours till bedtime, and she a tailored, rather overfed figure, with a freshly varnished face and unhealthy, bright, bold eyes, walking slightly ahead of her shambling companion, looking nervously about her in search of some indefinite thing that was gone from her life.

One day John Markley shuffled into our office, bedizened as usual, and fumbled in his pocket for several minutes before he could find the copy of the *Mexican Herald* containing the news of his boy's death in Vera Cruz. He had passed the time of life for tears, yet when he asked us to reprint the item he said sadly: "The old settlers will remember him—maybe. I don't know whether they will or not." He seemed a pitiful figure as he dragged himself out of the office—so stooped and weazened, and so utterly alone, but when he turned around and came back upon some second thought, his teeth snapped viciously as he snarled: "Here, give

it back. I guess I don't want it printed. They don't care for me, anyway."

The boys in his office told the boys in our office that the old man was cross and petulant that year, and there is no doubt that Isabel Markley was beginning to find her mess of pottage bitter. The women around town, who have a wireless system of collecting news, said that the Markleys quarrelled, and that she was cruel to him. Certain it is that she began to feed on young boys, and made the old fellow sit up in his evening clothes until impossible hours, for sheer appearance sake, while his bed was piled with the wraps of boys and girls from what our paper called the Hand-holders' Union, who were invading the Markley home, eating the Markley olives and canned lobster, and dancing to the music of the Markley pianola. Occasionally a young travelling man would be spoken of by these young people as Isabel Markley's fellow.

Mrs. Markley began to make fun of her husband to the girls of the third-rate dancing set whose mothers let them go to her house; also, she reviled John Markley to the servants. It was known in the town that she nicknamed

him the "Goat." As for Markley, the fight was gone from him, and his whole life was devoted to getting money. That part of his brain which knew the accumulative secret kept its tireless energy; but his emotions, his sensibilities, his passions seemed to be either atrophied or burned out, and, sitting at his desk in the back room of the Mortgage Company's offices, he looked like a busy spider spinning his web of gold around the town. It was the town theory that he and Isabel must have fought it out to a finish about the night sessions; for there came a time when he went to bed at nine o'clock, and she either lighted up and prepared to celebrate with the cheap people at home, or attached one of her young men, and went out to some impossible gathering—generally where there was much beer, and many risqué things said, and the women were all good fellows. And thus another year flew by.

One night, when the great house was still, John Markley grew sick and, in the terror of death that, his office people say, was always with him, rose to call for help. In the dark hall, feeling for an electric-light switch, he must have

lost his way, for he fell down the hard oak stairs. It was never known how long he lay there unable to move one-half of his body, but his wife stood nearly an hour at the front door that night, and when she finally switched on the light, she and the man with her saw Markley lying before them with one eye shut and with half his face withered and dead, the other half around the open eye quivering with hate. He choked on an oath, and shook at her a gnarled bare arm. Her face was flushed, and her tongue was unsure, but she laughed a shrill wicked laugh and cried: "Ah, you old goat don't you double your fist at me!"

Whereupon she shuddered away from the shaking figure at her feet and scurried upstairs. And the man standing in the doorway, wondering what the old man had heard, wakened the house, and helped to carry John Markley upstairs to his bed.

It was nearly three months before he could be wheeled to his office, where he still sits every day, spinning his golden web and filling his soul with poison. They say that, helpless as he is, he may live for a score of years. Isabel Mark-

ley knows how old she will be then. A thousand times she has counted it.

To see our town of a summer twilight, with the families riding abroad behind their good old nags, under the overhanging elms that meet above our newly-paved streets, one would not think that there could exist in so lovely a place as miserable a creature as John Markley is; or as Isabel, his wife, for that matter. The town—out beyond Main Street, which is always dreary and ugly with tin gorgons on the cornices—the town is a great grove springing from a bluegrass sod, with porch boxes making flecks of colour among the vines; cannas and elephant ears and foliage plants rise from the wide lawns; and children bloom like moving flowers all through the picture.

There are certain streets, like the one past the Markley mansion, upon which we make it a point always to drive with our visitors—show streets we may as well frankly call them—and one of these leads down a wide, handsome street out to the college. There the town often goes in its best bib and tucker to hear the lecturers whom Mrs. Markley feeds. Last

winter one came who converted Dan Gregg—once Governor, but for ten years best known among us as the town infidel. The lecturer explained how matter had probably evolved from some one form—even the elements coming in a most natural way from a common source. He made it plain that all matter is but a form of motion; that atoms themselves are divided into ions and corpuscles, which are merely different forms of electrical motion, and that all this motion seems to tend to one form, which is the spirit of the universe. Dan said he had found God there, and, although the pious were shocked, in our office we were glad that Dan had found his God anywhere. While we were sitting in front of the office one fine evening this spring, looking at the stars and talking of Dan Gregg's God and ours, we began to wonder whether or not the God that is the spirit of things at the base of this material world might not be indeed the spirit that moves men to execute His laws. Men in the colleges to-day think they have found the moving spirit of matter; but do they know His wonderful being as well as the old Hebrew prophets knew it who

wrote the Psalms and the Proverbs and the wisdom of the Great Book. That brought us back to the old question about John Markley. Was it God, moving in us, that punished Markley "by the rod of His wrath," that used our hearts as wireless stations for His displeasure to travel through, or was it the chance prejudice of a simple people? It was late when we broke up and left the office—Dan Gregg, Henry Larmy, the reporter, and old George. As we parted, looking up at the stars where our ways divided out under the elms, we heard, far up Exchange Street, the clatter of the pianola in the Markley home, and saw the high windows glowing like lost souls in the night.

VIII

"A Bundle of Myrrh"

ONE of the first things that a new reporter on our paper has to learn is the kinology of the town. Until he knows who is kin to whom, and how, a reporter is likely at any time to make a bad break. Now, the kinology of a country town is no simple proposition. After a man has spent ten years writing up weddings, births and deaths, attending old settlers' picnics, family reunions and golden weddings, he may run into a new line of kin that opens a whole avenue of hitherto unexplainable facts to him, showing why certain families line up in the ward primaries, and why certain others are fighting tooth and toe-nail.

The only person in town who knows all of our kinology—and most of that in the county, where it is a separate and interminable study—is "Aunt" Martha Merryfield. She has lived here since the early fifties, and was a Perkins, one of the eleven Perkins children that grew

up in town; and the Perkinses were related by marriage to the Mortons, of whom there are over fifty living adult descendants on the town-site now. So one begins to see why she is called "Aunt Martha" Merryfield. She is literally aunt to over a hundred people here, and the habit of calling her aunt has spread from them to the rest of the population.

She lives alone in the big brick house on the hill, though her children and grandchildren and great-grandchildren are in and out all day and most of the night, so that she is not at all lonesome. She is the only person to whom we can look for accurate information about local history, and when a man dies who has been at all prominent in affairs of the town or county or State, we always call up "Aunt" Martha on the 'phone, or send a reporter to her, to learn the real printable and unprintable truth about him. She knows whom he "went with" before he was married, and why they "broke off," and what crowd he associated with in the early days; how he got his money, and what they used to "say" about him. If a family began putting on frills, she can tell how the head of the house got

his start by stealing "aid" sent to the grasshopper sufferers and opening a store with the goods. If a woman begins speaking of the hired girl as her "maid," contrary to the vernacular rules of the town, Aunt Martha does not hesitate to bring up the subject of the flour-sack underwear which the woman wore when she was a girl during the drought of '60.

Aunt Martha used to bring us flowers for the office table, and it was her delight to sit down and take out her corn-knife—as she called it—and go after the town shams. She has promised a dozen times to write an article for the paper, which she says we dare not print, entitled "Self-made Women I Have Known." She says that men were always bragging about how they had clerked, worked on farms, dug ditches and whacked mules across the plains before the railroads came; but that their wives insisted that they were princesses of the royal blood. She says she is going to include in her Self-made Women only those who have worked out, and she maintains that we will be surprised at the list.

Her particular animosity in the town is

Mrs. Julia Neal Worthington. Aunt Martha told us that when Tim Neal came to town he had a brogue you could scrape with a knife and an "O" before his name you could hoop a hogshead with. "And that woman," exclaimed Aunt Martha, when she was under full sail, "that woman, because she has two bookcases in the front room and reads the book-reviews in the *Delineator*, thinks that she is cultured. When her folks first came to town they were as poor as Job's turkey, which was not to their discredit—everyone was poor in those days. The old man Neal was as honest an old Mick as you'd meet in a day's journey, or at a fair, and he used to run a lemonade and peanut stand down by the bank corner. But his girls, who were raised on it, until they began teaching school, used to refer to the peanut stand as 'papa's hobby,' pretend that he only ran it for recreation, and say: 'Now *why* do you suppose papa enjoys it?—We just can't get him to give it up!' And now Julia is president of the Woman's Federation, has stomach trouble, has had two operations, and is suffering untold agonies with acute culturitis. And yet," Aunt

Martha would say through a beatific smile, "she's a good-enough woman in many ways, and I wouldn't say anything against her for the world."

Once Miss Larrabee, the society editor, brought back this from a visit to Aunt Martha: "I know, my dear, that your paper says there are no cliques and crowds in society in this town, and that it is so democratic. But you and I know the truth. We know about society in this town. We know that if there ever was a town that looked like a side of bacon—streak of lean and streak of fat all the way down—it is this blessed place. Crowds?—why, I've lived here over fifty years and it was always crowds. 'Way back in the days when the boys used to pick us up and carry us across Elm Creek when we went to dances, there were crowds. The girls who crossed on the boys' backs weren't considered quite proper by the girls who were carried over in the boys' arms. And they didn't dance in the same set."

Miss Larrabee says she looked into the elder woman's eyes to find which crowd Aunt Martha belonged to, when she flashed out:

"Oh, child, you needn't look at me—I did both; it depended on who was looking! But, as I was saying, if anyone knows about society in this town, I do. I went to every dance in town for the first twenty-five years, and I have made potato salad to pay the salary of every Methodist preacher for the past thirty years, and I ought to know what I'm talking about." There was fire enough to twinkle in her old eyes as she spoke. "Beginning at the bottom, one may say that the base of society is the little tads, ranging down from what your paper calls the Amalgamated Handholders, to the trundle-bed trash just out of their kissing games. It's funny to watch the little tads grow up and pair off and see how bravely they try to keep in the swim. I've seen ten grandchildren get out and I've a great-grandchild whose mother will be pushing her out before she is old enough to know anything. When young people get married they all say they're not going to be old-marriedy, and they hang on to the dances and little hops until the first baby comes. Then they don't get out to the dances much, but they join a card club."

In her dissertation on the social progress of young married people, Aunt Martha explained that after the second year the couple go only to the big dances where everyone is invited, but they pay more attention to cards. The young mother begins going to afternoon parties, and has the other young married couples in for dinner. Then, before they know it, they are invited out to receptions and parties, where little tads preside at the punch-bowls and wait on table, and are seen and not heard. Aunt Martha continued:

"By the time the second baby comes they take one of two shoots—either go in for church socials or edge into a whist club. In this town, I think, on the whole, that the Congregational Whist Club is younger and gayer than the Presbyterian Whist Club, but in most towns the Episcopalians have the really fashionable club. Of course, these clubs never call themselves by the church names, but they are generally made up along church lines—except we poor Methodists and Baptists—we have to divide ourselves out among the others to keep the preacher from going after us."

Aunt Martha's eyes danced with the mischief in her heart as she went on: "Now, if after the second baby comes, the young parents begin to feel like saving money, and being someone at the bank, they join the church and go in for church socials, which don't take so much time or money as the whist clubs and receptions. The babies keep coming and the young people keep on improving their home, moving from the little house to the big house; the young man's name begins to creep into lists of directors at the bank, and they are invited out to the big parties, and she goes to all the stand-up and 'gabble-gobble-and-git' receptions. As they grow older, they are asked with the preachers and widows for the first night of a series of parties at a house to get them out of the way and over with before the young folks come later in the week. When they get to a point where the young folks laugh and clap their hands at little pudgy daddy when he dances 'Old Dan Tucker' at the big parties in the brick houses, it's all up with them—they are old married folks, and the next step takes them to the old folks' whist club, where the bankers' wives and

the insurance widows run things. That is the inner sanctuary, the holy of holies in the society of this town."

After a pause Aunt Martha added: "You'd think, to hear these chosen people talk, that the benighted souls who go to missionary teas, Woman's Relief Corps chicken-pie suppers, and get up bean-dinners for the church on election day, live on another planet. Yet I guess we're all made of the same kind of mud.

"That reminds me of the Winthrops. When they came here, back in the sixties, it happened to be Fourth of July, and the band was out playing in the grove by the depot. Mrs. Winthrop got off the train quite grandly and bowed and waved her hand to the band, and the Judge walked over and gave the band leader five dollars. They said afterward that they felt deeply touched to find a raw Western town so appreciative of the coming of an old New England family, that it greeted them with a band. Before Mrs. Winthrop had been here three weeks she called on me, 'as one of the first ladies of the town,' she said, to organise and see if we couldn't break up the habit of the

hired girls eating at the table with the family." Aunt Martha smiled and her eyes glittered as she added: "After they organised, the titled aristocracy of this town did their own work and sent the washing out for a year or more."

The talk drifted back to the old days, and Aunt Martha got out her photograph-album and showed Miss Larrabee the pictures of those whom she called "the rude forefathers of the village," in their quaint old costumes of war-times. In the book were baby pictures of middle-aged men and women, and youthful pictures of the old men and women of the town. But most interesting of all to Miss Larrabee were the daguerreotypes—quaint old portraits in their little black boxes, framed in plush and gilt. The old woman brought out picture after picture—her husband's among the others, in a broad beaver hat with a high choker taken back in Brattleboro before he came to Kansas. She looked at it for a long minute, and then said gaily to Miss Larrabee: "He was a handsome boy—quite the beau of the State when we were married—Judge of the District Court at twenty-four." She held the case in her hand and

went on opening the others. She came to one showing a moustached and goateed youth in a captain's uniform—a slim, straight, soldierly figure. As she passed it to Miss Larrabee Aunt Martha looked sidewise at her, saying: "You wouldn't know him now. Yet you see him every day, I suppose." After the girl shook her head, the elder woman continued: "Well, that's Jim Purdy, taken the day he left for the army." She sighed as she said: "Let me see, I guess I haven't happened to run across Jim for ten years or more, but he didn't look much like this then. Poor old Jim, they tell me he's not having the best time in the world. Someway, all the old-timers that are living seem to be hard up, or in bad health, or unhappy. It doesn't seem right, after what they've done and what they've gone through. But I guess it's the way of life. It's the way life gets even with us for letting us outlive the others. Compensation—as Emerson says."

Miss Larrabee came down the lilac-bordered walk from the stately old brick house, carrying a great bouquet of sweet peas and nasturtiums and poppies and phlox, a fleeting



"Jim Purdy, taken the day he left for the army"

memory of some association she had in her mind of Uncle Jimmy Purdy and Aunt Martha kept tantalising her. She could not get it out of the background of her consciousness, and yet it refused to form itself into a tangible conception. It was associated vaguely with her own grandmother, as though, infinite ages ago, her grandmother had said something that had lodged the idea in the girl's head.

When the occasion made itself, Miss Larrabee asked her grandmother the question that puzzled her, and learned that Martha Perkins and Jim Purdy were lovers before the war, and that she was wearing his ring when he went away—thinking he would be back in a few weeks with the Rebellion put down. In his first fight he was shot in the head and was in the hospital for a year, demented; when he was put back in the ranks he was captured and his name given out among the killed. In prison his dementia returned and he stayed there two years. Then for a year after his exchange he followed the Union Army like a dumb creature, and not until two years after the close of the war did the poor fellow drift home again, as

one from the dead—all uncertain of the past and unfitted for the future.

And his sweetheart drank her cup alone. The old settlers say that she never flinched nor shrank, but for years, even after her marriage to the Judge, the young woman kept a little grave covered with flowers, that bore the simple words: "Martha, aged five months and three days." They say that she did not lose her courage and that she bent her head for no one. But the war brought her neighbours so many sorrows that Martha's trouble was forgotten, the years passed and only the old people of the community know about the little grave beside the Judge's and their little boy's. Jimmy Purdy grew into a smooth-faced, unwrinkled, rather blank-eyed old man, clerking in the bookstore for a time, serving as City Clerk for twenty years, and later living at the Palace Hotel on his pension. He worshipped Aunt Martha's children and her children's children, but he never saw her except when they met in some casual way. She was married when he came back from the war, and if he ever knew her agony he never spoke of it. Whenever he

talked of the events before the war, his face wore a troubled, baffled look, and he did not seem to remember things clearly. He was a simple old man with a boyish face and heart who was confused by the world growing old around him.

One day they found him dead in his bed. And Miss Larrabee hurried out to Aunt Martha's to get the facts about his life for the paper. It was a bright October morning as she went up the walk to the old brick house, and she heard someone playing on the piano, rolling the chords after the grandiose manner of pianists fifty years ago. A voice seemed to be singing an old ballad. As the girl mounted the steps the voice came more distinctly to her. It was quavering and unsure, but with a moan of passion the words came forth:

"As I lay my heart on your dead heart,—Douglas, Douglas, Douglas, tender and true——"

Suddenly the voice choked in a groan. As she stood by the open door Miss Larrabee could see in the darkened room the figure of an old woman racked with sobs on a great mahogany

sofa, and on the floor beside her lay a daguerreo type, glinting its gilt and glass through th gloom.

The girl tiptoed across the porch, down th steps through the garden and out of the gate.

IX

Our Loathed but Esteemed Contemporary

NO one remembers a time when there were not two newspapers in our town —generally quarrelling with each other. Though musicians and doctors and barbers are always jealous of their business rivals, and though they show their envy more or less to their discredit, editors are so jealous of one another, and so shameless about it, that the profession has been made a joke. Certainly in our town there is a deep-seated belief that if one paper takes one side of any question, even so fair a proposition as street-paving, the other will take the opposing side.

Of course, our paper has not been contrary; but we have noticed a good many times—every one in the office has noticed it, the boys and girls in the back-office, and the boys and girls in the front-office—that whenever we take a stand for anything, say for closing the stores

at six o'clock, the General swings the *Statesman* into line against it. If he has done it once he has done it fifty times in the last ten years; and, though we have often felt impelled to oppose some of the schemes which he has brought forward, it has been because they were bad for the town, and perhaps because, even though they did seem plausible, we knew that the unscrupulous gang that was behind these schemes would in some way turn them into a money-making plot to rob the people. We never could see that justification in the *Statesman's* position. To us it seemed merely pigheadedness. But the passing years are teaching us to appreciate the General better, and each added year is seeming to make us more tolerant of his shortcomings.

Counting in the three years he was in the army, he has been running the *Statesman* for forty-five years, and for thirty-five years he was master of the field. For thirty years this town was known as General A. Jackson Durham's town. He ran the county Republican conventions, and controlled the five counties next to ours, so that, though he could never go to Congress himself, on account of his accumu-



He advertised the fact that he was a good hater by showing callers at his office his barrel

lation of enemies, he always named the successful candidate from the district, and for a generation held undisturbed the selection of postmasters within his sphere of influence. In State politics he was more powerful than any Congressman he ever made. Often he came down to the State Convention with blood in his eye after the political scalp of some politician who had displeased him, and the fight he made and the disturbance he started, gave him the name of Old Bull Durham. On such occasions, he would throw back his head, shut his eyes and roar his wrath at his opponents in a most disquieting manner, and when he returned home, whether he had won or lost his fight, his paper would bristle for two or three weeks with rage, and his editorial page would be full of lurid articles written in short exclamatory sentences, pocked with italics, capital letters and black-faced lines.

For General A. Jackson Durham was a fire-eater and was proud of it. He advertised the fact that he was a good hater by showing his barrel to callers at his office. In that barrel he had filed away every disreputable thing that he

had been able to find against friend or foe, far or near, and when the friend became a foe, or the foe became troublesome, the General opened his barrel. He kept also an office blacklist, on which were written the names of the men in town that were never to be printed in the *Statesman*. When we established our little handbill of a newspaper, he made all manner of fun of our "dish-rag," as he called it, and insisted on writing so much about our paper that people read it to see what we had to say. Other papers had made the mistake of replying to the General in kind, and people had soon tired of the quarrel and dropped the new quarrelling paper for the old one. The State never had seen the General's equal as a wrangler; but we did not fight back, and there was only a one-sided quarrel for the people to tire of. We grew and got a foothold in the town, but the General never admitted it. He does not admit it now, though his paper has been cut down time and again, and is no larger than our little dish-rag was in the beginning. But he still maintains his old assumpton of the power that departed years ago. He walked proudly out of the County Conventon the day

that it rode over him, and he still begins the names of the new party leaders in the county in small letters to show his contempt for them.

The day of his downfall in the County Convention marked the beginning of his decline in State politics. When it was known that his county was against him, people ceased to fear him and in time new leaders came in the State whom he did not know even by sight; but the General did not recognise them as leaders. To him they were interlopers. He sent his paper regularly to the old leaders, who had been shoved aside as he had been, and wrote letters to them urging them to arouse the people to throw off the chains of bossdom. Five years ago he and a number of lonesome and forgotten ones, who formerly ruled the State with an iron hand, and whose arrogance had cost the party a humiliating defeat, organised the "Anti-Boss League," and held semi-annual conventions at the capital. They made long speeches and issued long proclamations, and called vehemently upon the people to rend their chains, but some way the people didn't heed the call, and the General and his boss-busters, as they were

called, began to have hard work getting their "calls" and "proclamations" and "addresses" into the city papers. The reporters referred to them as the Ancient Order of Has-Beens, and wounded the General's pride by calling him Past Master of the Grand Lodge of Hons. He came home from the meeting of the boss-busters at which this insult had been heaped upon him and bellowed like a mad bull for six months, using so much space in his paper that there was no room at all for local news.

In the General's idea of what a newspaper should contain, news does not come first, and he does not mind crowding it out. He believes that a newspaper should stand for "principles." The *Statesman* was started during the progress of the Civil War, when issues were news, and the General has never been able to realize that in times of peace people buy a newspaper for its news and not for its opinions. He never could understand our attitude toward what he called "principles." When the town was for free silver, we were for the gold standard, and we never exerted ourselves particularly for a high tariff, and when the General saw our paper

grow in spite of its heresies, he was amazed, and expressed his amazement in columns of vitriolic anger. Because we often ignored "issues" and "principles" and "great basic and fundamental ideas," as he called his contentions on the silver and tariff questions, for lists of delegates at conventions, names of pupils at the county institute, and winners of prizes at the fair, he was filled with alarm for the future of the noble calling of journalism.

Long ago we quit making fun of him. One day we wrote an article referring to him as "the old man," and it was gossiped among the printers that he was cut to the heart. He did not reply to that, and although a few days later he referred to us as thieves and villains, we never had the heart to tease him again, and now every one around the office has instructions to put "General" before his name whenever it is used. Probably this cheers him up. At least it should do so, for in spite of his pride and his much advertised undying wrath, he is in truth a tender-hearted old man, and has never been disloyal to the town. It is the apple of his eye. His fierceness has always been more for

publication than as an evidence of good faith. He likes to think that he is unforgiving and relentless, but he has a woman's heart. He fought the renomination of Grant for a third term most bitterly, but when the old commander died, the boys in the *Statesman* office say that Durham sniffled gently while he wrote the obituary, and when he closed with the words "Poor Grant," he laid his head on the table and his frame shook in real sorrow.

Most of the subscribers have left his paper, and few of the advertisers use it, but what seems to hurt him worst is his feeling that the town has gone back on him. He has given all of his life to this town; he has spent thousands of dollars to promote its growth; he has watched every house on the town-site rise, and has made an item in his paper about it; he has written up the weddings of many of the grandmothers and grandfathers of the town; he has chronicled the birth of their children and children's children. The old scrapbooks are filled with kind things that the General has written. Old men and old women scan these wrinkled pages with eyes that have lost their

lustre, and on the rusty clippings pasted there fall many tears. In this book many a woman reads the little verse below the name of a child whom only she and God remember. In some other scrapbook a man, long since out of the current of life, reads the story of his little triumph in the world; in the family Bible is a clipping from the *Statesman*—yellow and crisp with years—that tells of a daughter's wedding and the social glory that descended upon the house for that one great day. So, as the General goes about the streets of the town, in his shiny long frockcoat and his faded campaign hat, men do not laugh at him, nor do they hate him. He is the old buffalo, horned out of the herd.

The profession of newspaper making is a young man's profession. The time will come when over at our office there will be a shrinkage. Even now our leading citizens never go away from town and talk to other newspaper men that they do not say that if someone would come over here and start a bright, spicy newspaper he could drive us out of town and make money. The best friends we have, when they talk to newspaper men in other towns are not

above saying that our paper is so generally hated that it would be no trouble to put it out of business. That is what people said of the General in the eighties. They do not say it now.

For the fight is over with him. And he is walking on an old battlefield, reviewing old victories, not knowing that another contest is waging further on. Sometimes the boys in the *Statesman* office get their money Saturday night, and sometimes they do not. If they do not, the General grandly issues "orders" on the grocery stores. Then he takes his pen in hand and writes a stirring editorial on the battle of Cold Harbor, and closes by enquiring whether the country is going to forget the grand principles that inspired men in those trying days.

In the days when the *Statesman* was a power in the land, editorials like this were widely quoted. He was department commander of the G. A. R. at a time when such a personage was as important in our State as the Governor. The General's editorials on pensions were read before the Pensions Committee in Congress and had much weight there, and even in the White

House the General's attitude was reckoned with. When he rallied the old soldiers to any cause the earth trembled, but now the General's editorials pass unheeded. When he calls to "the men who defended this country in one great crisis to rise and rescue her again," he does not understand that he is speaking to a world of ghosts, and that his "clarion note" falls on empty air. The old boys whom he would arouse are sleeping; only he and a little handful survive. Yet to him they still live; to him their power is still invincible—if they would but rally to the old call. He believes that some day they will rally, and that the world, which is now going sadly wrong, will be set right. With his hands clasped behind him, looking through his steel-rimmed glasses, from under his shaggy brows, he walks through a mad world, waiting for it to return to reason. In his fiery black eyes one may see a puzzled look as he views the bewildering show. He is confused, but defiant. His head is still high; he has no thought of surrender. So, day after day, he riddles the bedlam about him with his broadsides, in the hourly hope of victory.

It was only last week that the General was in Jim Bolton's livery stable office asking Jim if he had any old ledgers, that the *Statesman* office might have. He explained that he tore off their covers, cut them up and used the unspoiled sheets for copy-paper. In Bolton's office he met a farmer from the Folcraft neighbourhood in the southern end of the county, who hadn't seen the General for half-a-dozen years. "Why—hello General," exclaimed the farmer with unconcealed surprise, as though addressing one risen from the dead. "You still around here? What are you doing now?" The old man tucked the ledger under his arm, straightened up with great dignity, and tried not to wince under the blow. He put one hand in his shiny, frayed, greenish-black frockcoat, and replied with quiet dignity, "I am following my profession, sir—that of a journalist." And after fixing the farmer with his piercing black eyes for a moment, the General turned away and was gone.

When we do something to displease him, he turns all his guns on us, though probably his foreman has to borrow paper from our office

to get the *Statesman* out. The General regards us as his natural prey and his foreman regards our paper stock as his natural forage—but they use so little that we do not mind.

Once a new bookkeeper in our office saw the General's old account for paper. She sent the General a statement, and another, and in the third she put the words: "Please remit." The day after he had received the insult the General stalked grandly into the office with the amount of money required by the bookkeeper. He put it down without a word and walked over to the desk where the proprietor was working.

"Young man," said the General, as he rapped with his cane on the desk. "I was talking to-day with a gentleman from Norwalk, Ohio, who knew your father. Yes, sir; he knew your father, and speaks highly of him, sir. I am surprised to hear, sir, that your father was a perfect gentleman, sir. Good-morning, sir."

And with that the General moved majestically out of the office.

X

A Question of Climate

COLONEL MORRISON had three initials, so the town naturally called him "Alphabetical" Morrison, and dropped the "Colonel." He came to our part of the country in an early day—he used to explain that they caught him in the trees, when he was drinking creek water, eating sheep-sorrel, and running wild with a buffalo tail for a trolley, and that the first thing they did, after teaching him to eat out of a plate, was to set him at work in the grading gang that was laying out the Cottonwood and Walnut Rivers and putting the limestone in the hills. He was one of the original five patriots who laid out the Corn Belt Railroad from the Mississippi to the Pacific, and was appointed one of that committee to take the matter to New York for the inspection of capitalists—and be it said to the credit of Alphabetical Morrison that he was the only person in the crowd with money enough to pay

the ferryman when he reached the Missouri River, though he had only enough to get himself across. But in spite of that the road was built, and though it missed our town, it was because we didn't vote the bonds, though old Alphabetical went through the county, roaring in the schoolhouses, bellowing at the crossroads, and doing all that a good, honest pair of lungs could do for the cause. However, he was not dismayed at his failure, and began immediately to organise a company to build another road. We finally secured a railroad, though it was only a branch.

Over his office door he had a sign—"Land Office"—painted on the false board front of the building in letters as big as a cow, and the first our newspaper knew of him was twenty years ago, when he brought in an order for some stationery for the Commercial Club. At that time we had not heard that the town supported a Commercial Club—nor had anyone else heard of it, for that matter—for old Alphabetical was the president, and his bookkeeper, with the Miss dropped off her name, was secretary. But he had a wonderfully alluring let-

terhead printed, and seemed to get results, for he made a living while his competitors starved. Later, when he found time, he organised a real Commercial Club, and had himself elected president of it. He used to call meetings of the club to discuss things, but as no one cared much for his monologues on the future of the town, the attendance was often light. He issued circulars referring to our village as "the Queen City of the Prairies," and on the circulars was a map, showing that the Queen City of the Prairies was "the railroad axis of the West." There was one road running into the town; the others old Alphabetical indicated with dotted lines, and explained in a foot-note that they were in process of construction.

He became possessed of a theory that a canning factory would pay in the Queen City of the Prairies, and the first step he took toward building it was to invest in a high hat, a long coat and white vest, and a pair of mouse-coloured trousers. With these and his theory he went East and returned with a condition. The canning factory went up, but the railroad rates went wrong, and the factory was never opened.

Alphabetical blinked at it through his gold-rimmed glasses for a few weeks, and then organised a company to turn it into a woollen mill. He elected himself president of that company and used to bring around to our paper, notices of directors' meetings, and while he was in the office he would insist that we devoted too much space to idle gossip and not enough to the commercial and industrial interests of the Queen City.

At times he would bring in an editorial that he had written himself, highly excitable and full of cyclonic language, and if we printed it Alphabetical would buy a hundred copies of the paper containing it and send them East. His office desk gradually filled with woodcuts and zinc etchings of buildings that never existed save in his own dear old head, and about twice a year during the boom days he would bring them around and have a circular printed on which were the pictures showing the imaginary public buildings and theoretical business thoroughfares of the Queen City.

The woollen mill naturally didn't pay, and he persuaded some Eastern capitalists to install

an electric plant in the building and put a street-car line in the town, though the longest distance from one side of the place to the other was less than ten blocks. But Alphabetical was enthusiastic about it, and had the Governor come down to drive the first spike. It was gold-plated, and Alphabetical pulled it up and used it for a paper-weight in his office for many years, and it is now the only reminder there is in town of the street railway, except a hard ridge of earth over the ties in the middle of Main Street. When someone twitted him on the failure of the street railway he made answer:

"Of course it failed; here I go pawing up the earth, milking out the surplus capital of the effete East, and building up this town—and what happens? Four thousand old silurian fossils comb the moss on the north side of 'em, with mussel shell, and turn over and yawp that old Alphabetical is visionary. Here I get a canning factory and nobody eats the goods; I hustle up a woollen factory, and the community quits wearing trousers; I build for them a street-car line to haul them to and from thëir palatial

residences, and what do the sun-baked human mud turtles do but all jump off the log into the water and hide from them cars like they were chariots of fire? What this town needs is not factories, nor railroads, nor modern improvements—Old Alphabetical can get them—but the next great scheme I go into is to go down to the river, get some good red mud, and make a few thousand men who will build up a town."

It has been fifteen years and over since Colonel Morrison put on his long coat and high hat and started for the money markets of the East, seeking whom he might devour. At the close of the eighties the Colonel and all his tribe found that the stock of Eastern capitalists who were ready to pay good prices for the fine shimmering blue sky and bracing ozone of the West was running low. It was said in town that the Colonel had come to the end of his string, for not only were the doors of capital closed to him in the East, but newcomers had stopped looking for farms at home. There was nothing to do but to sit down and swap jack-knives with other land agents, and as they had taken most of the agencies for the best insurance companies

while the Colonel was on dress parade, there was nothing left for him to do but to run for justice of the peace, and, being elected, do what he could to make his tenure for life.

Though he was elected, more out of gratitude for what he had tried to do for the town than because people thought he would make a fair judge, he got no further than his office in popular esteem. He did not seem to wear well with the people in the daily run and jostle of life. During the forty years he has been in our town, he has lived most of the time apart from the people—transacting his business in the East, or locating strangers on new lands. He has not been one of us, and there were stories afloat that his shrewdness had sometimes caused him to thrust a toe over the dead-line of exact honesty. In the town he never helped us to fight for those things of which the town is really proud: our schools, the college, the municipal ownership of electric lights and waterworks, the public library, the abolition of the saloon, and all of the dozen small matters of public interest in which good citizens take a pride. Colonel Morrison was living his grand

life, in his tailor-made clothes, while his townsmen were out with their coats off making our town the substantial place it is. So in his latter days he is old Alphabetical Morrison, a man apart from us. We like him well enough, and so long as he cares to be justice of the peace no one will object, for that is his due. But, someway, there is no talk of making him County Clerk; and there is a reason in everyone's mind why no party names him to run for County Treasurer. He has been trying hard enough for ten years to break through the crust of the common interests that he has so long ignored. One sees him at public meetings—a rather wistful-looking, chubby-faced old man—on the edge of the crowd, ready to be called out for a speech. But no one calls his name; no one cares particularly what old Alphabetical has to say. Long ago he said all that he can say to our people.

The only thing that Alphabetical ever organised that paid was a family. In the early days he managed to get a home clear of indebtedness and was shrewd enough to keep it out of all of his transactions. Tow-headed Morrisons filled the schoolhouse, and twenty years later there

were so many of his girls teaching school that the school-board had to make a ruling limiting the number of teachers from one family in the city school, in order to force the younger Morrison girls to go to the country to teach. In these days the girls keep the house going and Alphabetical is a notary public and a justice of the peace, which keeps his office going in the little square board building at the end of the street. But every day for the past ten years he has been coming to our office for his bundle of old newspapers. These he reads carefully, and sometimes what he reads inspires him to write something for our paper on the future of the Queen City, though much oftener his articles are retrospective. He is the president of the Old Settlers' Society, and once or twice a year he brings in an obituary which he has written for the family of some of the old-timers.

One would think that an idler would be a nuisance in a busy place, but, on the contrary, we all like old Alphabetical around our office. For he is an old man who has not grown sour. His smooth, fat face has not been wrinkled by the vinegar of failure, and the noise that came



He likes to sit in the old swayback swivel-chair and tell us his theory of

from his lusty lungs in the old days is subsiding. But he has never forgiven General Durham, of the *Statesman*, for saying of a fight between Alphabetical and another land agent back in the sixties that "those who heard it pronounced it the most vocal engagement they had ever known." That is why he brings his obituaries to us; that is why he does us the honour of borrowing papers from us; and that is why, on a dull afternoon, he likes to sit in the old sway-back swivel-chair and tell us his theory of the increase in the rainfall, his notion about the influence of trees upon the hot winds, his opinion of the disappearance of the grasshoppers. Also, that is why we always save a circus-ticket for old Alphabetical, just as we save one for each of the boys in the office.

One day he came into the office in a bad humour. He picked up a country paper, glanced it over, threw it down, kicked from under his feet a dog that had followed a subscriber into the room, and slammed his hat into the waste-basket with considerable feeling as he picked up a New York paper.

"Well—well, what's the matter with the

judiciary this morning?" someone asked the old man.

He did not reply at once, but turned his paper over and over, apparently looking for something to interest him. Gradually the revolutions of his paper became slower and slower, and finally he stopped turning the paper and began reading. It was ten or fifteen minutes before he spoke. When he put down the paper his cherubic face was beaming, and he said:

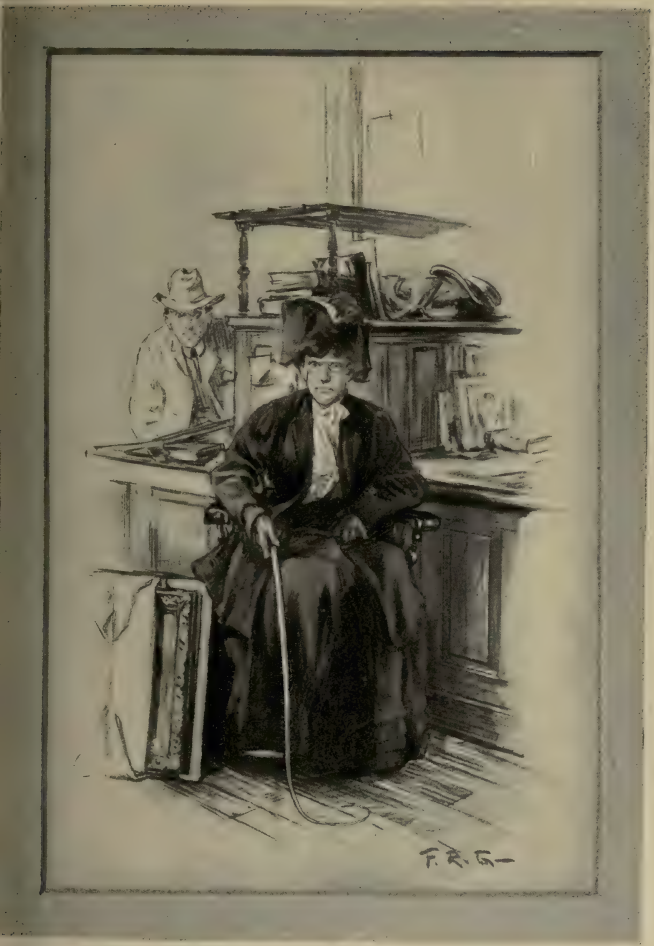
"Oh—I know I'm a fool, but I wish the Lord had sent me to live in a town large enough so that every dirty-faced brat on the street wouldn't feel he had a right to call me 'Alphabetical'! Dammit, I've done the best I could! I haven't made any alarming success. I know it. There's no need of rubbing it in on me."—He was silent for a time with his hands on his knees and his head thrown back looking at the ceiling. Almost imperceptibly a smile began to crack his features, and, when he turned his eyes to the man at the desk, they were dancing with merriment, as he said: "Just been reading a piece here in the *Sun* about the influence of climate on human endeavour. It says that in

northern latitudes there is more oxygen in the air and folks breathe faster, and their blood flows faster, and that keeps their livers going. Trouble with me has always been climate—sluggish liver. If I had had just a little more oxygen floating round in my system, the woollen mill would still be running, the street-cars would be going, and this town would have had forty thousand inhabitants. My fatal mistake was one of latitude. But"—and he drawled out the word mockingly—"but I guess if the Lord had wanted me to make a town here he would have given me a different kind of liver!" He slapped his knees as he sighed: "This is a funny world, and the more you see of it the funnier it gets." The old man grinned complacently at the ceiling for a minute, and before getting out of his chair kicked his shoe-heels together merrily, wiped his glasses as he rose, put his bundle of papers under his arm, and left the office whistling an old, old-fashioned tune.

XI

The Casting Out of Jimmy Myers

IT seemed a cruel thing to do, but we had to do it. For ours is ordinarily a quiet office. We have never had a libel suit. We have had fewer fights than most newspaper offices have, and while it hardly may be said that we strive to please, still in the main we try to get on with the people, and tell them as much truth as they are entitled to for ten cents a week. Naturally, we do our best to get up a sprightly paper, and in that the Myers boy had our idea exactly. He was industrious; more than that, he tried with all his might to exercise his best judgment, and no one could say that he was careless; yet everyone around the office admitted that he was unlucky. He was one of those persons who always have slivers on their doors, or tar on the knocker, when opportunity comes their way; so his stay in the office was marked by a series of seismic disturbances in



And camped in the office for two days, looking for Jimmy

the paper that came from under his desk, and yet he was in no way to blame for them.

We took him from the college at the edge of town. He had been running the college paper for a year, and knew the merchants around town fairly well; and, since he was equipped as far as education went, he seemed to be a likely sort of a boy for reporter and advertising solicitor.

One of the first things that happened to him was a mistake in an item about the opera house. He said that a syndicate had taken a lien on it. What he meant was a lease, and as he got the item from a man who didn't know the difference, and as the boy stuck to it that the man had said lien and not lease, we did not charge that up to him. A few days later he wrote for a town photographer a paid local criticising someone who was going around the county peddling picture-frames and taking orders for enlarged pictures. That was not so bad, but it turned out that the pedlar was a woman, and she came with a rawhide and camped in the office for two days waiting for Jimmy, while he came in and out of the back door, stuck his copy on the hook by

stealth, and travelled only in the alleys to get his news. One could hardly say that he was to blame for that, either, as the photographer who paid for the item didn't say the pedlar was a woman, and the boy was no clairvoyant.

One dull day he wrote a piece about the gang who played poker at night in Red Martin's room. Jimmy said he wasn't afraid of Red, and he wasn't. The item was popular enough, and led to a raid on the place, which disclosed our best advertiser sitting in the game. To suppress his name meant our shame before the town; to print it meant his—at our expense. It was embarrassing, but it wasn't exactly the boy's fault. It was just one of those unfortunate circumstances that come up in life. However, the advertiser aforesaid began to hate the boy.

He must have been used to injustice all his life, for there was a vertical line between his eyes that marked trouble. The line deepened as he went further and further into the newspaper business; for, generally speaking, a person who is unlucky has less to fear handling dynamite than he has writing local items on a country paper.

A few days after the raid on the poker-room Jimmy, who had acquired a particularly legible hand; wrote: "The hem of her skirt was trimmed with pink crushed roses," and he was in no way to blame for the fact that the printer accidentally put an "h" for a "k" in skirt, though the woman's husband chased Jimmy into a culvert under Main Street and kept him there most of the forenoon, while the cheering crowd informed the injured husband whenever Jimmy tried to get out of either end of his prison.

The printer that made the mistake bought Jimmy a new suit of clothes, we managed to print an apology that cooled the husband's wrath, and for ten days, or perhaps two weeks, the boy's life was one round of joy. Everything was done promptly, accurately and with remarkable intelligence. He whistled at his work and stacked up more copy than the printers could set up in type. No man ever got in or out of town without having his name in our paper. Jimmy wrote up a railroad bond election meeting so fairly that he pleased both sides, and reported a murder trial so well that the lawyers for each side kept the boy's pockets full of ten-cent

cigars. The vertical wrinkle was fading from his forehead, when one fine summer morning he brought in a paid item from a hardware merchant, and went blithely out to write up the funeral of the wife of a prominent citizen. He was so cheerful that day that it bothered him.

He told us in confidence that he never felt festive and gay that something didn't happen. He was not in the building that evening when the paper went to press, but after it was printed and the carriers had left the office he came in, singing "She's My Sweetheart, I'm Her Beau," and sat down to read the paper.

Suddenly the smile on his face withered as with frost, and he handed the paper across the table to the bookkeeper, who read this item:

DIED—MRS. LILLIAN GILSEY.

Prepare for the hot weather, my good woman. There is only one way now; get a gasoline stove, of Hurley & Co., and you need not fear any future heat.

And it wasn't Jimmy's fault. The foreman had merely misplaced a head line, but that explanation did not satisfy the bereaved family.

Jimmy was beginning to acquire a reputation as a joker. People refused to believe that such things just happened. They did not happen before Mr. James Myers came to the paper—why should they begin with his coming and continue during his engagement? Thus reasoned the comforters of the Gilseys, and those interested in our downfall. The next day the *Statesman* wrote a burning editorial denouncing us "for an utter lack of all sense of common decency" that permitted us "to violate the sacredest feeling known to the human heart for the sake of getting a ribald laugh from the unthinking." We were two weeks explaining that the error was not the boy's fault. People assumed that the mistake could not have occurred in any well-regulated printing office, and it didn't seem probable that it could occur—yet there it was. But Jimmy wasn't to blame. He suffered more than we did—more than the bereaved family did. He went unshaven and forgot to trim his cuffs or turn his collar. He hated to go on the streets for news, and covered with the office telephone as much of his beat as possible.

The summer wore away and the dog days

came. The Democratic State campaign was about to open in our town, and orators and statesmen assembled from all over the Missouri valley. There was a lack of flags at the dry-goods stores. The Fourth of July celebration had taken all the stock. The only materials available were some red bunting, some white bunting, and some blue bunting with stars dotted upon it. With this bunting the Committee on Reception covered the speakers' stand, wrapping the canopy under which the orators stood in the solid colours and the star-spangled blue. It was beautiful to see, and the pride of the window-dresser of the Golden Eagle Clothing Store. But the old soldiers who walked by nudged one another and smiled.

About noon of the day of the speaking the City Clerk, who wore the little bronze button of the G. A. R., asked Jimmy if he didn't want someone to take care of the Democratic meeting. Jimmy, who hated politics, was running his legs off to get the names of the visitors, and was glad to have the help. He turned in the contributed copy without reading it, as he had done with the City Clerk's articles many times be-

fore, and this is what greeted his horrified eyes when he read the paper:

" UNDER THE STARS & BARS "

Democracy Opens Its State Campaign Under the Rebel Emblem To-day
A Fitting Token
Treasonable Utterances Have a Proper Setting

And then followed half a column of most violent abuse of the Democrats who had charge of the affair. Jimmy did not appear on the street that night, but the next morning, when he came down, the office was crowded with indignant Democrats " stopping the paper."

We began to feel uneasy about Jimmy. So long as his face was in the eclipse of grief there seemed to be a probability that we would have no trouble, but as soon as his moon began to shine we were nervous.

Jimmy had a peculiar knack of getting up little stories of the town—not exactly news stories, but little odd bits that made people smile without rancour when they saw their names in the quaintly turned items. One day he wrote up a story of a little boy whose

mother asked him where he got a dollar that he was flourishing on his return with his father from a visit in Kansas City. The little boy's answer was that his father gave it to him for calling him uncle when any ladies were around. It was merrily spun, and knowing that it would not make John Lusk, the boy's father, mad, we printed it, and Jimmy put at the head of it a foolish little verse of Kipling's. Miss Larrabee, at the bottom of her society column, announced the engagement of two prominent young people in town. The Saturday paper was unusually readable. But when Jimmy came in after the paper was out he found Miss Larrabee in tears, and the foreman leaning over the counter laughing so that he couldn't speak. It wasn't Jimmy's fault. The foreman had done it—by the mere transposition of a little brass rule separating the society news from Jimmy's story with the Kipling verse at the head of it. The rule tacked the Kipling verse onto Miss Larrabee's article announcing the engagement. Here is the way it read:

"This marriage, which will take place at St. Andrew's Church, will unite two of the most

popular people in town and two of the best-known families in the State.

"And this is the sorrowful story
Told as the twilight fails,
While the monkeys are walking together,
Holding each other's tails!"

Now, Jimmy was no more to blame than Miss Larrabee, and many people thought, and think to this day, that Miss Larrabee did it—and did it on purpose. But for all that it cast clouds over the moon of Jimmy's countenance, and it was nearly a year before he regained his merry heart. He was nervous, and whenever he saw a man coming toward the office with a paper in his hand Jimmy would dash out of the room to avoid the meeting. For an hour after the paper was out the ringing of the telephone bell would make him start. He didn't know what was going to happen next.

But as the months rolled by he became calm, and when Governor Antrobus died, Jimmy got up a remarkably good story of his life and achievements, and though there was no family left to the dear old man to buy extra copies, all the old settlers—who are the hardest peo-

ple in the world to please—bought extra copies for their scrapbooks. We were proud of Jimmy, and assigned him to write up the funeral. That was to be a "day of triumph in Capua." There being no relatives to interfere, the lodges of the town—and the Governor was known as a "jiner"—had vied with one another to make the funeral the greatest rooster-feather show ever given in the State. The whole town turned out, and the foreman of our office, and everyone in the back room who could be spared, was at the Governor's funeral, wearing a plume, a tin sword, a red leather belt, or a sash of some kind. We put a tramp printer on to make up the paper, and told Jimmy to call by the undertaker's for a paid local which the undertaker had written for the paper that day.

Jimmy's face was beaming as he snuggled up to his desk at three o'clock that afternoon. He said he had a great story—names of the pall-bearers, names of the double sextette choir, names of all the chaplains of all the lodges who read their rituals, names of distinguished guests from abroad, names of the ushers at the church. Page by page he tore off his copy and gave it

to the tramp printer, who took it in to the machines. Trusting the foreman to read the proof, Jimmie rushed out to get from a United States Senator who was attending the funeral an interview on the sugar scandal, for the Kansas City *Star*.

The rest of us did not get back from the cemetery until the carriers had left the office, and this is what we found:

"The solemn moan of the organ had scarcely died away, like a quivering sob upon the fragrant air, when the mournful procession of citizens began filing past the flower-laden bier to view the calm face of their beloved friend and honoured townsman. In the grief-stricken hush that followed might be heard the stifled grief of some old comrade as he paused for the last time before the coffin.

"At this particular time we desire to call the attention of our readers to the admirable work done by our hustling young undertaker, J. B. Morgan. He has been in the city but a short time, yet by his efficient work and careful attention to duty, he has built up an enviable reputation and an excellent custom among the best

families of the city. All work done with neatness and dispatch. We strive to please.

"When the last sad mourner had filed out, the pall-bearers took up their sorrowful task, and slowly, as the band played the 'Dead March in Saul,' the great throng assembled in the street viewed the mortal remains of Governor Antrobus start on their last long journey."

Of course it wasn't Jimmy's fault. The "rising young undertaker" had paid the tramp printer, who made up the forms, five dollars to work his paid local into the funeral notice. But after that—Jimmy had to go. Public sentiment would no longer stand him as a reporter on the paper, and we gave him a good letter and sent him onward and upward. He took his dismissal decently enough. He realised that his luck was against him; he knew that we had borne with him in all patience.

The day that he left he was instructing the new man in the ways of the town. Reverend Frank Milligan came in with a church notice. Jimmy took the notice and began marking it for the printer. As the door behind him opened and closed, Jimmy, with his head still in his work,



Reverend Milligan came in with a church notice

called across the room to the new man: "That was old Milligan that just went out—beware of him. He will load you up with truck about himself. He rings in his sermons; trots around with church social notices that ought to be paid for, and tries to get them in free; likes to be referred to as doctor; slips in mean items about his congregation, if you don't watch him; and insists on talking religion Saturday morning when you are too busy to spit. More than that, he has an awful breath—cut him out; he will make life a burden if you don't—and if you do he will go to the old man with it, and say you are not treating him right."

There was a rattling and a scratching on the wire partition between Jimmy and the door. Jimmy looked up from his work and saw the sprightly little figure of Parson Milligan coming over the railing like a monkey. He had not gone out of the door—a printer had come in when it opened and shut. And then Jimmy took his last flying trip out of the back door of the office, down the alley, "toward the sunset's purple rim." It was not his fault. He was only telling the truth—where it would do the most good.

XII

"'A Babbled of Green Fields"

OUR town is set upon a hillside, rising from a prairie stream. Forty years ago the stream ran through a thick woodland nearly a mile wide, and in the woodland were stately elms, spreading walnut trees, shapely oaks, gaunt white sycamores, and straight, bushy hackberries, that shook their fruit upon the ice in spots least frequented by skaters. Along the draws that emptied into the stream were pawpaw trees, with their tender foliage, and their soft wood, which little boys delighted to cut for stick horses. Beneath all these trees grew a dense underbrush of buckeyes, blackberries, raspberries, gooseberries, and little red winter berries called Indian beads by the children. Wild grapevines, "poison" grapes, and ivies of both kinds wove the woods into a mass of summer green. In the clearings and bordering the wood grew the sumach, that

flared red at the very thought of Jack Frost's coming. In these woods the boys of our town—many of whom have been dead these twenty years—used to lay their traps for the monsters of the forest, and trudged back from the timber before breakfast, in winter, bringing home redbirds, and rabbits and squirrels. Sometimes a particularly doughty woodsman would report that there were wildcat tracks about his trap; but none of us ever saw a wildcat, though Enoch Haver, whose father's father had heard a wildcat scream, and had taught the boy its cry, would hide in a hollow sycamore and screech until the little boys were terrified and would not go alone to their traps for days. In summer, boys, usually from the country, or from a neighbouring town, caught 'coons, and dragged them chained through alleys for our boys to see, and 'Dory Paine had an owl which was widely sought by other boys in the circus and menagerie line. The boys of our town in that day seemed to live in the wood and around the long millpond, though little fellows were afraid that lurking Indians or camping gypsies might steal them—a boy's superstition, which experience has proved

too good to be true. They fared forth to the riffle below the dam, which deepens in the shade under the water elm; this was the pool known as "baby hole," despised of the ten-year-olds, who plunged into the deepest of the thicket and came out at the limekiln, where all day long one might hear "so-deep, so-deep, so-deep," and "go-round, go-round, go-round," until school commenced in the fall. Then the rattle of little homemade wagons, and the shrilling of boy voices might be heard all over the wilderness, and the black-stained hands of schoolboys told of the day of the walnut harvest. It was nearly a mile from the schoolhouse to the woods, and yet on winter afternoons no school-ma'am could keep the boys from using school hours to dig out the screw-holes and heel-plates of their boots before wadding them with paper. At four o'clock a troop of boys would burst forth from that schoolhouse so wildly that General Durham of the *Statesman,* whose office we used to pass with a roar, always looked up from his work to say: "Well, I see hell's out for noon again."

In the spring the boys fished, and on Satur-

days go, up the river or down, or on either side, where one would, one was never out of sight of some thoughtful boy, sitting either on a stump or on a log stretching into the stream, or squatting on a muddy bank with his worm can beside him, throwing a line into the deep, green, quiet water. Always it was to the woods one went to find a lost boy, for the brush was alive with fierce pirates, and blood-bound brotherhoods, and gory Indian fighters, and dauntless scouts. Under the red clay banks that rose above the sluggish stream, robbers' caves, and treasure houses, and freebooters' dens, were filled with boys who, five days in the week and six hours a day, could *"amo amas amat, amamus amatus amant"* with the best of them. On Sundays these same boys sat with trousers creeping above the wrinkles at the ankles of their copper-toed, red-topped boots, recited golden texts, sang "When He Cometh," and while planning worse for their own little brothers, read with much virtuous indignation of little Joseph's wicked brothers, who put him in a pit. After Sunday School was over these highly respected young persons walked sedately

in their best clothes over the scenes of their Saturday crimes.

They say the woods are gone now. Certainly the trees have been cut away and the underbrush burned; cornfields cover the former scenes of valorous achievement; but none the less the woods are there; each nook and cranny is as it was, despite the cornfields. Scattered about the sad old earth live men who could walk blindfolded over the dam, across the millrace, around the bend, through the pawpaw patch to the grapevine home of the "Slaves of the Magic Tree;" who could find their trail under the elder bushes in Boswell's ravine, though they should come—as they often come—at the dead of night from great cities and from mountain camps and from across seas, and foregather there, in the smoke and dirt of the rendezvous to eat their unsalted sacrificial rabbit. They can follow the circuitous route around John Betts's hog lot, to avoid the enemy, as easily to-day as they could before the axe and the fire and the plough made their fine pretence of changing the landscape. And when Joe Nevison gets ready to signal them from his

seat high in the crotch of the oak tree across the creek, the " Slaves of the Tree " will come and obey their leader. They say that the tree is gone, and that Joe is gone, but we know better; for at night, when the Tree has called us, and we hear the notes from the pumpkin-stem reed, we come and sit in the branches beneath him and plan our raids and learn our passwords, and swear our vengeance upon such as cross our pathway. There may have been a time when men thought the Slaves of the Tree were disbanded; indeed it did seem so, but as the years go by, one by one they come wandering back, take their places in the branches of the magic tree, swing far out over the world like birds, and summon again the *genius loci* who has slept for nearly forty years.

Of course we knew that Joe would be the first one back; he didn't care what they said—even then; he registered his oath that it made no difference what they did to him or what the others did, he would never desert the Tree. He commanded all of us to come back; if not by day then to gather in the moonlight and bring our chicken for the altar and our eggs for the cere-

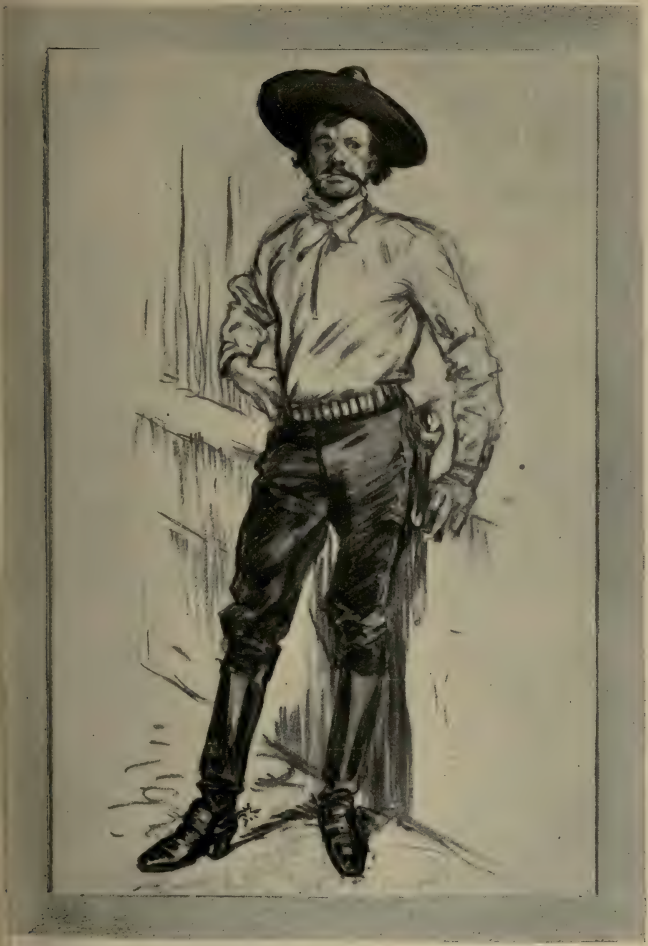
mony, and he promised that he would be there. We were years and years in obeying Joe Nevison. Many of us have had long journeys to go; and some of us lead little children by the hand as we creep up the hollow, crawl through the gooseberry bushes, and 'coon the log over the chasm to our meeting place. But we are nearly all there now; and in the moonlight, when the corn seems to be waving over a wide field, a tree springs up as by magic and we take our places again as of old.

Many years have passed since Marshal Furgeson stood those seven Slaves of the Magic Tree in line before the calaboose door and made them surrender the feathered cork apple-stealers and the sacred chicken hooks. In those years many terrors have ridden the boys who have gone out into the world to fight its dragons and grapple with its gorgons; but never have those boys felt any happiness so sweet as that which rested on their hearts when they heard the Marshal say, "Now you boys run on home—but mind you if I ever——" and he never did—except Joe Nevison. Once it was for boring a hole in the depot platform

and tapping a barrel of cider; once it was for going through a window in the Hustler hardware store and taking a box of pocketknives and two revolvers, with which to reward his gang, and finally, when the boy was in the midst of his teens, for breaking into the schoolhouse and burning the books. Joe's father always bought him off, as fathers always can buy boys off, when mothers go to the offended person and promise, and beg, and weep. So Joe Nevison grew up the town bad boy—defiant of law, reckless and unrestrained, with the blood of border ruffianism in his veins and the scorn of God and man and the love of sin in his heart. The week after he left town, and before he was twenty, his father paid for "Red" Martin's grey race horse, which disappeared the night Joe's bed was found empty. In those days the Nevisons had more money than most of the people in our town, but as the years went by they began to lose their property, and it was said that it went in great slices to Joe, to keep him out of the penitentiary.

We knew that Joe Nevison was in the West. People from our town, who seem to swarm over

the earth, wrote back that they had met Joe in Dodge City, in Leoti, in No-Man's-Land, in Texas, in Arizona—wherever there was trouble. Sometimes he was the hired bad man of a desert town, whose business it was to shoot terror into the hearts of disturbers from rival towns; sometimes he was a free lance—living the devil knows how—always dressed like a fashion-plate of the plains in high-heeled boots, wide felt hat, flowing necktie, flannel shirt and velvet trousers. They say that he did not gamble more than was common among the sporting men of his class, and that he never worked. Sometimes we heard of him adventuring as a land dealer, sometimes as a cattleman, sometimes as a mining promoter, sometimes as a horseman, but always as the sharper, who rides on the crest of the forward wave of civilization, leaving a town when it tears down its tents and puts up brick buildings, and then appearing in the next canvas community, wherein the night is filled with music, and the cares that infest the day are drowned in bad whiskey or winked out with powder and shot. And thus Joe Nevison closed his twenties—a desert scorpion, outcast



A desert Scorpion, outcast by society and proud of it

by society and proud of it. As he passed into his thirties he left the smoky human crystals that formed on the cow trails and at the mountain gold camps. Cripple Creek became too effete for him, and an electric light in a tent became a target he could not resist; wherefore he went into the sage brush and the short grass, seeking others of his kind, the human rattlesnake, the ranging coyote and the outlawed wolf. Joe Nevison rode with the Dalton gang, raided ranches and robbed banks with the McWhorters and held up stages as a lone highwayman. At least, so men said in the West, though no one could prove it, and at the opening of Lawton he appeared at the head of a band of cutthroats, who were herded out of town by the deputy United States marshals before noon of the first day. Not until popular government was established could they get in to open their skin-game, which was better and safer for them than ordinary highway faring. At Lawton our people saw Joe and he asked about the home people, asked about the boys—the old boys he called them—and becoming possessed of a post-office address, Joe wrote a long letter to George

Kirwin, the foreman of our office. We call him old George, because he is still under forty. Joe being in an expansive mood, and with more money on his clothes than he cared for, sent old George ten dollars to pay for a dollar Joe had borrowed the day he left town in the eighties. We printed Joe's letter in our paper, and it pleased his mother. That was the beginning of a regular correspondence between the rover and the home-stayer. George Kirwin, gaunt, taciturn, and hard-working, had grown out of the dreamy, story-loving boy who had been one of the Slaves of the Magic Tree and into a shy old bachelor who wept over "East Lynne" whenever it came to the town opera house, and asked for a lay-off only when Modjeska appeared in Topeka, or when there was grand opera at Kansas City. But he ruled the back office with an iron hand and superintended the Mission Sunday-School across the track, putting all his spare money into Christmas presents for his pupils. After that first letter that came from Joe Nevison, no one had a hint of what passed between the two men. But a month never went by that Joe's letter missed. When Lawton began to

wane, Joe Nevison seemed to mend his wayward course. He moved to South McAlester and opened a faro game—a square game they said it was—for the Territory! This meant that unless Joe was hard up every man had his chance before the wheel. Old George took the longest trip of his life, when we got him a pass to South McAlester and he put on his black frock coat and went to visit Joe. All that we learned from him was that Joe "had changed a good deal," and that he was "taking everything in the drug store, from the big green bottle at the right of the front door clear around past the red prescription case, and back to the big blue bottle at the left of the door." But after George came home the Mission Sunday-School began to thrive. George was not afraid of tainted money, and the school got a new library, which included "Tom Sawyer" and "Huckleberry Finn," as well as "Hans Brinker and the Silver Skates" for the boys, and all the "Pansy" books for the girls. It was a quaint old lot of books, and George Kirwin was nearly a year getting it together. Also he bought a new stove for his Sunday-School room, and a lot

of pictures for the church walls, among others "Wide Awake and Fast Asleep," "Simply to Thy Cross," and "The Old Oaken Bucket." He gave to the school a cabinet organ with more stops than most of the children could count.

A year ago a new reporter brought in this item: "Joseph Nevison, of South McAlester, I. T., is visiting his mother, Mrs. Julia Nevison, at 234 South Fifth Street."

We sent the reporter out for more about Joe Nevison and at noon George Kirwin hurried down to the little home below the tracks. From these two searchers after truth we learned that Joe Nevison's mother had brought him home from the Indian Territory mortally sick. Half-a-dozen of us who had played with him as boys went to see him that evening, and found a wan, haggard man with burned-out black eyes, lying in a clean white bed. He seemed to know each of us for a moment and spoke to us through his delirium in a tired, piping voice—like the voice of the little boy who had been our leader. He called us by forgotten nicknames, and he hummed at a tune that we had not heard for a score of years. Then he piped out "While the

Landlubbers Lie Down Below, Below, Below," and followed that with "Green Grass Growing all Around, all Around," and that with the song about the "Tonga Islands," his voice growing into a clearer alto as he sang. His mother tried to quiet him, but he smiled his dead smile at her through his cindery eyes, shook his head and went on. When he had lain quiet for a moment, he turned to one of us and said: "Dock, I'm goin' up and dive off that stump—a back flip-flop—you dassent!" Pretty soon he seemed to come up snuffing and blowing and grinning and said, "Last man dressed got to chaw beef." Then he cried: "Dock's it—Dock's it; catch 'im, hold him—there he goes—duck him, strip him. O well, let him go if he's go'n' to cry. Say, boys, I wish you fellers'd come over t' my stick horse livery stable—honest I got the best hickory horse you ever see. Whoa, there—whoa now, I tell you. You Pilliken Dunlevy let me harness you; there, put it under your arm, and back of your neck—no I ain't go'n' to let you hold it—I'll jerk the tar out of you if you don't go. Whe-e-e that's the way to go, hol—hold on, whoa there. Back up. Let's go over to Jim's

and run on his track. Say, Jim, I got the best little pacer in the country here—get up there, Pilliken," and he clucked and sawed his arms, and cracked an imaginary whip. When George came in, the face on the bed brightened and the treble voice said: "Hello Fatty—we've been waitin' for you. Now let's go on. What you got in your wagon—humph—bet it's a pumpkin. Did old Boswell chase you?" and then he laughed, and turned away from us. His trembling hands seemed to be fighting something from his face. "Bushes," whispered Enoch Haver, and then added, "Now he's climbing up the bank of the ravine." And we saw the lean hands on the bed clutch up the wall, and then the voice broke forth: "Me first—first up—get away from here, Dock—I said first," and we could see his hands climbing an imaginary tree.

His face glowed with the excitement of his delirium as he climbed, and then apparently catching his breath he rested before he called out: "I'm comin' down, clear the track for old Dan Tucker," and from the convulsive gripping of his hands and arms and the hysterical

intake of his breath we who had seen Joe Nevison dive from the top of the old tree, from limb to limb to the bottom, knew what he was doing. His heart was thumping audibly when he finished, and we tried to calm him. For a while we all sat about him in silence—forgetting the walls that shut us in, and living with him in the open, Slaves of the Magic Tree. Then one by one we left and only George Kirwin stayed with the sick man.

Joe Nevison had lived a wicked life. He had been the friend and companion of vile men and the women whom such men choose, and they had lived lives such as we in our little town only read about—and do not understand. Yet all that night Joe Nevison roamed through the woods by the creek, a little child, and no word passed his lips that could have brought a hint of the vicious life that his manhood had known.

In that long night, while George Kirwin sat by his dying friend, listening to his babble, two men were in the genii's hands. They put off their years as a garment. Together they ran over the roofs of buildings on Main Street that have been torn down for thirty years; they

played in barns and corncribs burned down so long ago that their very site is in doubt; they romped over prairies where now are elm-covered streets; and they played with boys and girls who have lain forgotten in little sunken graves for a quarter of a century, out on the hill; or they called from the four winds of heaven playmates who left our town at a time so remote that to the watcher by the bed it seemed ages ago. The games they played were of another day than this. When Joe began crying "Barbaree," he summoned a troop of ghosts, and the pack went scampering through the spectre town in the starlight; and when that game had tired him the voice began to chatter of "Slap-and-a-kick," and "Foot-and-a-half," and of "Rolly-poley," and of the ball games—"Scrub," and "Town-ball," and "Anteover," each old game conjuring up spirits from its own vasty deep until the room was full of phantoms and the watcher's memory ached with the sweet sorrow of old joys.

George Kirwin says that long after midnight Joe awakened from a doze, fumbling through the bedclothes, looking for something. Finally

he complained that he could not find his mouth-harp. They tried to make him forget it, but when they failed, his mother went to the bureau and pulling open the lower drawer found a little varnished box; under the shaded lamp she brought out a sack of marbles, a broken bean-shooter, with whittled prongs, a Barlow knife, a tintype picture of a boy, and the mouth-organ. This she gave to the hands that fluttered about the face on the pillow. He began to play "The Mocking Bird," opening and shutting his bony hands to let the music rise and fall. When he closed that tune he played "O the Mistletoe Bough," and after that over and over again he played "Tenting on the Old Camp Ground." When he dropped the mouth-harp, he lay very still for a time, though his lips moved incessantly. The morning was coming, and he was growing weak. But when his voice came back they knew that he was far afield again; for he said, "Come on, fellers, let's set down here under the hill and rest. It's a long ways back." When he had rested he spoke up again, "Say, fellers, what'll we sing?" George tried him with a gospel hymn, but Joe would have none of it,

and reviled the song and the singer after the fashion of boys. In a moment he exclaimed: "Here—listen to me. Let's sing this," and his alto voice came out uncertainly and faintly: "Wrap Me up in My Tarpaulin Jacket."

George Kirwin's rough voice joined the song and the mother listened and wept. Other old songs followed, but Joe Nevison, the man, never woke up. It was the little boy full of the poetry and sweetness of a child at play, the boy who had turned the poetry of his boyish soul into a life of adventure unchecked by moral restraint, whose eyes they closed that morning.

And George Kirwin explained to us when he came down to work that afternoon, that maybe the bad part of Joe Nevison's soul had shrivelled away during his sickness, instead of waiting for death. George told us that what made him sad was that a soul in which there was so much that might have been good had been stunted by life and was entering eternity with so little to show for its earthly journey.

When one considers it, one finds that Joe Nevison wasted his life most miserably. There was nothing to his credit to say in his obit-

uary—no good deed to recount and there were many, many bad ones. Moreover, the sorrow and bitterness that he brought into his father's last days, and the shame that he put upon his mother, who lived to see his end, made it impossible for our paper to say of him any kind thing that would not have seemed maudlin.

Yet at Joe Nevison's funeral the old settlers, many of them broken in years and by trouble, gathered at the little wooden church in the hollow below the track, to see the last of him, though certainly not to pay him a tribute of respect. They remembered him as the little boy who had trudged up the hill to school when the old stone schoolhouse was the only stone building in town; they remembered him as he was in the days when he began to turn Marshal Furgeson's hair grey with wild pranks. They remembered the boy's childish virtues, and could feel the remorse that must at times have gnawed his heart. Also these old men and women knew of the devil of unbridled passion that the child's father had put into Joe's blood. And when he started down the broad road they had seen his track beyond him. So as the little gathering of

old people filed through the church door and lined up on the sidewalk waiting for the mourners to come out, we heard through the crowd white haired men sighing: "Poor Joe; poor fellow." Can one hope that God's forgiveness will be fuller than that!

XIII

A Pilgrim in the Wilderness

A FEW years ago we were getting out a special edition of our paper, printed on book-paper, and filled with pictures of the old settlers, and we called it "the historical edition." In preparing the historical edition we had to confer with "Aunt" Martha Merrifield so often that George Kirwin, the foreman, who was kept trotting to her with proof-slips and copy for her to revise, remarked, as he was making up the last form of the troublesome edition, that, if the recording angel ever had a fire in his office, he could make up the record for our town from "Aunt" Martha's scrapbook. In that big, fat, crinkly-leafed book, she has pasted so many wedding notices and birth notices and death notices that one who reads the book wonders how so many people could have been born, married and died in a town of only ten thousand inhabitants. One evening, while the historical edition was growing, a reporter

spent the evening with "Aunt" Martha. The talk drifted back to the early days, and "Aunt" Martha mentioned Balderson. To identify him she went to her scrapbook, and as she was turning the pages she said:

"In those days of the early seventies, before the railroad came, when the town awoke in the morning and found a newly arrived covered waggon near a neighbour's house, it always meant that kin had come. If at school that day the children from the house of visitation bragged about their relatives, expatiating upon the power and riches that they left back East, the town knew that the visitors were ordinary kin; but if the children from the afflicted household said little about the visitors and evidently tried to avoid telling just who they were, then the town knew that the strangers were poor kin—probably some of "his folks"; for it was well understood that the women in this town all came from high connections 'back East' in Illinois, Ohio, Indiana, and Iowa. Newcomers sometimes wondered how such a galaxy of princesses and duchesses and ladyships happened to marry so far beneath their station.

"But the Dixons had no children, so when a covered waggon drove up to their place in the night, and a fussy, pussy little man with a dingy, stringy beard, appeared in the Dixons' back yard in the morning, looking after the horses hitched to the strange waggon; the town had to wait until the next week's issue of the *Statesman* to get reliable news about their prospective fellow-citizen." With that "Aunt" Martha opened her scrapbook and read a clipping from the *Statesman*, under the head, "A Valuable Acquisition to Our City." It ran:

"It has been many months since we have been favoured with a call from so cultured and learned a gentleman as the Hon. Andoneran P. Balderson, late of Quito, Hancock County, Iowa, who has finally determined to settle in our midst. Cramped by the irritating conventionalities of an effete civilisation, Colonel Balderson comes among us for that larger freedom and wider horizon which his growing powers demand. He comes with the ripened experience of a jurist, a soldier, and a publicist, and, when transportation facilities have been completed between this and the Missouri River, Judge

Balderson will bring to our little city his magnificent law library; but until then he will be found over the Elite Oyster Bay, where he will be glad to welcome clients and others.

"Having participated in the late War of the Rebellion, as captain in Company G of Colonel Jennison's famous and invincible army of the border, Colonel Balderson will give special attention to pension matters. He also will set to work to obtain a complete set of abstracts, and will be glad to give advice on real-estate law and the practice of eminent domain, to which subject he has given deep study. All business done with neatness and despatch.

"Before leaving Iowa, and after considerable pressure, Judge Balderson consented to act as agent for a number of powerful Eastern fire insurance companies, and has in contemplation the establishment of the Southwestern distributing point for the Multum in Parvo Farm Gate Company, of which corporation Colonel Balderson owns the patent right for Kansas. This business, however, he would be willing to dispose of to proper parties. Terms on application.

"The colonel desires us to announce that

there will be a meeting of the veterans of the late war at the school-house next Saturday night, for the purpose of organising a society to refresh and perpetuate the sacred memories of that gigantic struggle, and to rally around the old flag, touch shoulders again, and come into a closer fellowship for benevolent, social, and other purposes. The judge, on that occasion, will deliver his famous address on the 'Battle of Look Out Mountain,' in which battle Colonel Balderson participated as a member of an Iowa regiment. Admission free. Silver collection to defray necessary expenses."

Accompanying this article was a slightly worn woodcut of the colonel in his soldier garb, a cap with the top drawn forward, the visor low over his eyes, and a military overcoat thrown gaily back, exposing his shoulder. The picture showed the soldier in profile, with a fierce military moustache and a stubby, runty goatee, meant to strike terror to the civilian heart.

From "Aunt" Martha we learned that before Judge Balderson had been in town a week he had dyed his whiskers and had taken command of our forces in the county-seat war then

brewing. During the judge's first month in the county the campaign for the county-seat election was opened, and he canvassed the north end of the county for our town, denouncing, with elaborate eloquence, as horse thieves, mendicants, and renegades from justice, the settlers in the south end of the county who favoured the rival town. The judge organised a military company and picketed the hills about our town day and night against a raid from the Southenders; and, having stirred public passion deeply, he turned his pickets loose on the morning of election day to set prairie fires all over the south end of the county to harass the settlers who might vote for the rival town and keep them away from the polls fighting fire.

Our people won; " the hell-hounds of disorder and anarchy "—as Judge Balderson called the rival townspeople—were " rebuked by the stern hand of a just and terrible Providence." Balderson was a hero, and our people sent him to the legislature. " Aunt " Martha added:

" He went to Topeka in his blue soldier clothes, his campaign hat, and brass buttons; but he came back, at the first recess, in diamonds

and fine linen, and the town sniffed a little." Having learned this much of Balderson our office became interested in him, and a reporter was set to work to look up Balderson. The reporter found that according to Wilder's "Annals," Balderson hustled himself into the chairmanship of the railroad committee and became a power in the State. The next time Colonel "Alphabetical" Morrison came to the office he was asked for further details about Balderson. The Colonel told us that when the legislature finally adjourned, very proud and very drunk, in the bedlam of the closing hours, Judge Balderson mounted a desk, waved the Stars and Stripes, and told of the Battle of Look Out Mountain. Colonel Morrison chuckled as he added: "The next day the *State Journal* printed his picture—the one with the slouching cap, the military moustache, the fierce goatee, and the devil-may-care cape—and referred to the judge as 'the silver-tongued orator of the Cottonwood,' a title which began to amuse the fellows around town."

Naturally he was a candidate for Congress. Colonel Morrison says that Balderson became

familiarly known in State politics as Little Baldy, and was in demand at soldiers' meetings and posed as the soldier's friend.

Wilder's "Annals" records the fact that Balderson failed to go to Congress, but went to the State Senate. He waxed fat. We learned that he bought a private bank and all the books recording abstracts of title to land in his county, and that he affected a high silk hat when he went to Chicago, while his townsmen were inclined to eye him askance. The lack of three votes from his home precinct kept him from being nominated lieutenant-governor by his party, but Colonel Morrison says that Balderson soon took on the title of governor, and was unruffled by his defeat. The Colonel describes Balderson as assuming the air of a kind of sacred white cow, and putting much hair-oil and ointment and frankincense upon his carcass. Other old settlers say that in those days his dyed whiskers fairly glistened. And when, at State conventions, in the fervour of his passion he unbent, unbuttoned his frock-coat, grabbed the old flag, and charged up and down the platform in an oratorical frensy, it seemed that

another being had emerged from the greasy little roll of adipose in which "Governor" Balderson enshrined himself. His climax was invariably the wavering battle-line upon the mountain, the flag tottering and about to fall, "when suddenly it rises and goes forward, up—up—up the hill, through the smoke of hell, and full and fair into the teeth of death, with ten thousand cheering, maddened soldiers behind it. And who carried that flag—who carried that flag?" he would scream, in a tremulous voice, repeating his question over and over, and then answer himself in tragic bass: "The little corporal of Company B!" And, "Who fell into the arms of victory that great day, with four wounds upon his body? The little corporal of Company B!" It is hardly necessary to add that Governor Balderson was the little corporal.

After the failure of his bank, when rumour accused him of burning the court-house that he might sell his abstracts to the county at a fabulous price, he called a public meeting to hear his defence, and repeated to his townsmen that query, "Who carried the flag?" adding in a hoarse whisper: "And yet—great God!—they

say that the little corporal is an in-cen-di-ary-Was this great war fought in vain, that tr-e-e-sin should lift her hydra head to hiss out such blasphemy upon the boys who wore the blue?"

However, the evidence was against him, and as our people had long since lost interest in the flag-bearer, the committee gave him five minutes to leave. He returned three minutes in change and struck out over the hill towards the west, afoot, and the town knew him no more forever.

Where Balderson went after leaving town no one seems to know. The earth might have swallowed him up. But in 1882 someone sent a marked copy of the *Denver Tribune* to the *Statesman* office, the *Statesman* reprinted it, and "Aunt" Martha filed it away in her book. Here is it:

"Big Burro Springs, Colorado, September 7th (Special).—Three men were killed yesterday in a fight between the men at Jingle-bob ranch and a surveying party under A. P. Balderson. The Balderson party consisted of four men, among whom was 'Rowdy' Joe Nevison, the famous marshal of Leoti, Kansas. They were locating a reservoir site which Balderson has

taken up on Burro Creek for the Balderson Irrigation Company and for supplying the Look Out Townsite Company with water. These are Balderson's schemes, and, if established, will put the Jingle-bob ranch people out of business, as they have no title to the land on which they are operating. The remarkable part of the fight is that which Balderson took in it. After two of his men had been killed and the owner of the Jingle-bob ranch had fallen, Balderson and his two remaining men came forward with hands up, waving handkerchiefs. The Jingle-bob people recognised the flag of truce, and Balderson led his men across the creek to the cow-camp. Just as he approached close enough to the man who had the party covered, Balderson yelled, 'Watch out—back of you!' and, as all the captors turned their heads, Balderson knocked the pistol from the hand of the only man whose weapon was pointed at the Balderson party, and the next moment the cow-men looked into the barrels of the surveyors' three revolvers, and were told that if they budged a hair they would be killed. Balderson then disarmed the cow-men, and, after passing around the drinks, hired the

outfit as policemen for the town of Look Out. It is said that he has given them two thousand dollars apiece in Irrigation Company stock, has promised to defend them if they are charged with the murder of the two surveyors, and has given each cow-man a deed to a corner lot on the public square of the prospective Balderson town. Deputy Sheriff Crosby from this place went over to arrest Balderson, charged with killing D. V. Sherman of the Jingle-bob property, and, after asking for his warrant, Balderson took it, put it in his pocket, advised the deputy to hurry home, and, if he found any coyotes or jack-rabbits that couldn't get out of his way fast enough, not to stop to kill them, but shoo them off the trail and save time."

They say in Colorado that Balderson became an irrigation king. It is certain that he raised half a million dollars in New York for his dam and ditches. He built the "Look Out Opera House," and decorated it in gilded stucco and with red plush two inches deep. Morrison contributed this anecdote to the office Legend of Balderson: "He was in Florida in his private car when they finished the opera house. When

he came back and saw a plaster bust of Shakespeare over the proscenium arch, he waved his cane pompously and exclaimed: 'Take her down! Bill Shakespeare is all right for the effete East, but out here he ain't deuce high with the little corporal of Company B.'" So in Shakespeare's niche is a plaster-cast of a soldier's face with the slouch-cap, the military moustache, and the goatee of great pride, after the picture that once adorned the columns of the *Statesman*. For a time they talked of Balderson for United States Senator, and, at the laying of the corner-stone of the capitol, the Denver papers spoke of the masterly oration of former Governor Balderson of Kansas, whose marvellous word-painting of the Battle of Look Out Mountain held the vast audience spellbound for an hour. A few months later a cloudburst carried away the Big Burro dam, and times went bad, and the stockholders in Balderson's company, who would have rebuilt the dam, could not find Balderson when they needed him, and certain creditors of the company, hitherto unknown, appeared, and Balderson faded away like a morning star.

Here is a part of the narrative that George

Kirwin got from Joe Nevison: Joe began with the coal strike at Castle Rock, Wyoming, in 1893, when the strikers massed on Flat Top Mountain and day after day went through their drill. He told a highly dramatic story of the stoutish little man of fifty-five, with a fat, smooth-shaven face, who pounded that horde of angry men into some semblance of military order. All day the little man, in his shrunken seersucker coat and greasy white hat, would bark orders at the men, march and countermarch them, and go through the manual of arms, backward and forward and seven hands round. When the battle with the militia came, the strikers charged down Flat Top and fought bravely. The little man in the seersucker coat stayed with them, snapping orders at them, damning them, coaxing them. And when the deputies gathered up the strikers for the trial in court two months later, the little man was still there. He was prospecting on a gopher-hole somewhere up in the hills, and was trying to get his wildcat mine listed on the Salt Lake Mining Exchange. No one gave bond for the little man in the seersucker coat, and he went

to jail. He was Balderson. He seemed to give little heed to the trial, and sat with the strikers rather stolidly. Venire after venire of jurymen was gone through. At last an old man wearing a Loyal Legion button went into the jury-box. Balderson saw him; they exchanged recognising glances, and Balderson turned scarlet and looked away quickly. He nudged an attorney for the strikers and said: "Keep him, whatever you do."

After the evidence was all in and the attorneys were about to make their arguments, Balderson and one of the lawyers for the strikers were alone.

"They told me to take the part about you, Balderson; you were in the Union Army, weren't you?"

Balderson looked at the floor and said:

"Yes; but don't say anything about it."

The lawyer, who knew Balderson's record, was astonished. He had made his whole speech up on the line that Balderson as an old soldier would appeal to the sympathies of the jury. Over and over the lawyer pressed Balderson to know why nothing should be said of his soldier

record, and finally in exasperation the lawyer broke out:

"Lookee here, Baldy; you're too old to get coy. I'm going to make my speech as I've mapped it out, soldier racket and all. I guess you've taken enough trips up Look Out Mountain to get used to the altitude by this time."

The lawyer started away, but Balderson grabbed him and pulled him back. "Don't do it; for God's sake, don't do it! There's a fellow on that jury that's a G. A. R. man; we were soldiers together; he knows me from away back. Talk of Iowy; talk of Kansas; talk of anything on God's green earth, but don't talk soldier. That man would wade through hell for me neck deep on any other basis than that." Balderson's voice was quivering. He added: "But don't talk soldier." Balderson slumped, with his head in his hands. The attorney snapped at him:

"Weren't you a soldier?"

"Yes; oh, yes," Balderson sighed.

"Didn't you go up Look Out Mountain?"

"Oh, yes—that, too."

There was a silence between the men. The lawyer rasped it with, "Well, what then?"

"Well—well," and the tousled little man sighed so deeply his sigh was almost a sob, and lifted up the eyes of a whipped dog to the lawyer's—"after that I got in the commissary department—and—and — was dishonourably discharged." He rubbed his eyes with his fingers a moment and then grinned foxily: "Ain't that enough?"

Roosevelt is a mining-camp in Idaho. It is five days from a morning paper, and the camp is new. It is a log town with one street and no society, except such as may gather around the big box-stove at Johnnie Conyer's saloon. A number of ladies and two women lived in the camp, a few tin-horn "gents," and about two hundred men. It is a seven months' snow-camp, where men take their drama canned in the phonograph, their food canned, their medicine all out of one bottle, and their morals "without benefit of clergy." Across the front of one of the canvas-covered log store-rooms that fringe the single street a cloth sign is stretched. It reads, "Department Store," and inside a dance hall, a saloon, and a gambling-place are operating. A few years ago,

when Colonel Alphabetical Morrison was travelling through the West on a land deal for John Markley, business took him to Roosevelt, and he found Balderson, grey of beard, shiny of pate, with unkempt, ratty back hair; he was watery-eyed, and his red-veined skin had slipped down from his once fat face into draperies over his lean neck and jowls. He was in the dealer's chair, running the game.

The statute of limitations had covered all his Kansas misdeeds, and he nodded affably as his old acquaintance came in. Later in the day the two men went to Mrs. Smith's boarding-house to take a social bite. They sat in front of the log-house in the evening, Balderson mellow and reminiscent.

"Seems to me this way: I ain't cut out for society as it is organised. I do all right in a town until the piano begins to get respectable and the rules of order are tucked snugly inside the decalogue, then I slip my belt, and my running gear doesn't track. I get a few grand and noble thoughts, freeze to 'em, and later find that the hereditary appurtenances thereunto appertaining are private property of someone else, and there

is nothing for me to do but to stand a lawsuit or vanish. I have had bad luck, lost my money, lost my friends, lost my conscience, lost everything, pretty near"—and here he turned his watery eyes on his friend with a saw-toothed smile and shook his depleted abdomen, that had been worn off climbing many hills—"I've lost everything, pretty near, but my vermiform appendix and my table of contents, and as like as not I'll find some feller's got them copyrighted." He heaved a great sigh and resumed, "I suppose I could 'a' stood it all well enough if I had just had some sort of faith, some religious consolation, some creed, or god, or something." He sighed again, and then leered up: "But, you know—I'm so damned skeptic!"

Last spring, according to the Boisé, Idaho, papers, "Governor" Balderson and two other old soldiers celebrated Memorial Day in Roosevelt. They got a muslin flag as big as the flap of a shirt, from heaven knows where, and in the streets of Roosevelt they hoisted this flag on the highest pine pole in all the Salmon River Mountains. There were elaborate ceremonies, and to the miners and gamblers and keepers of wildcat

mines in the mountains assembled, " Governor " Balderson told eloquently of the Battle of Look Out Mountain. And Colonel Morrison who read the account smiled appreciatively and pointed out to us the exact stage in the proceedings where Balderson demanded to know who carried the flag. There was long and tumultuous applause at the climax.

We also read in the Boisé papers that at the fall election in Roosevelt they made Balderson justice of the peace, which, as Colonel Morrison explained, was a purely honorary office in a community where every man is his own court and constable and jury and judge; but the Colonel said that Balderson was proud of official distinction, and probably levied mild tribute from the people who indulged in riotous living, by compelling them to buy drink-checks redeemable only at his department store.

It was from the Boisé papers that we had the final word from Balderson. A message came to Roosevelt this spring that an outfit, thirty miles away at the head of Profile Creek, was sick and starving. It was a dangerous trip to the rescue, for snowslides were boom-

ing on every southern hillside. Death would literally play tag with the man who dared to hit the trail for Profile. Balderson did not hesitate a moment, but filled his pack with provisions, put a marked deck and some loaded dice in his pocket, and waved Roosevelt a cheery good-by as he struck out over the three logs that bridge Mule Creek. He was bundled to the chin in warm coats, and on his way met Hot Foot Higgins coming in from Profile. Balderson seems to have given Higgins his warmest coat before the snow-slide hit them. It killed them both. Hot Foot died instantly, but Balderson must have lived many hours, for the snow about his body was melted and in his pocket they found Hot Foot's watch.

They buried him near the trail where they found him, and, stuck in a candle-box, over the heap of stones above him, flutters lonesomely in the desolation of the mountain-side the little muslin rag that was once a flag. They call the hill on which he sleeps "Look Out Mountain."

Late this spring the mail brought to the office of the Boisé *Capital-News* a battered woodcut half a century old. When the *News* came to

our office we saw the familiar soldier's face in profile, with a cap drawn over the eyes, with a waving moustache and a fierce goatee, and across the shoulders of the figure a military cape thrown back jauntily. With the old cut in the Boisé paper was an article which the editor says in a note was written in a young woman's angular handwriting, done in pencil on wrapping-paper. The article told, in spelling unspeakable, of the greatness and goodness of "Ex-Governor Balderson of Kansas." It related that he was ever the "friend to the friendless"; that, "with all his worldly honours, he was modest and unassuming"; that "he had his faults, as who of us have not," but that he was "honest, tried and true"; and the memorial closed with the words: "Heaven's angel gained is Roosevelt's hero lost."

XIV

The Passing of Priscilla Winthrop

WHAT a dreary waste life in our office must have been before Miss Larrabee came to us to edit a society page for the paper! To be sure we had known in a vague way that there were lines of social cleavage in the town; that there were whist clubs and dancing clubs and women's clubs, and in a general way that the women who composed these clubs made up our best society, and that those benighted souls beyond the pale of these clubs were out of the caste. We knew that certain persons whose names were always handed in on the lists of guests at parties were what we called "howling swells." But it remained for Miss Larrabee to sort out ten or a dozen of these "howling swells" who belonged to the strictest social caste in town, and call them "howling dervishes." Incidentally it may be said that both Miss Larrabee and her mother were

dervishes, but that did not prevent her from making sport of them. From Miss Larrabee we learned that the high priestess of the howling dervishes of our society was Mrs. Mortimer Conklin, known by the sisterhood of the mosque as Priscilla Winthrop. We in our office had never heard her called by that name, but Miss Larrabee explained, rather elaborately, that unless one was permitted to speak of Mrs. Conklin thus, one was quite beyond the hope of a social heaven.

In the first place, Priscilla Winthrop was Mrs. Conklin's maiden name; in the second place, it links her with the Colonial Puritan stock of which she is so justly proud—being scornful of mere Daughters of the Revolution —and finally, though Mrs. Conklin is a grandmother, her maiden name seems to preserve the sweet, vague illusion of girlhood which Mrs. Conklin always carries about her like the shadow of a dream. And Miss Larrabee punctuated this with a wink which we took to be a quotation mark, and she went on with her work. So we knew we had been listening to the language used in the temple.

Our town was organised fifty years ago by Abolitionists from New England, and twenty years ago, when Alphabetical Morrison was getting out one of the numerous boom editions of his real estate circular, he printed an historical article therein in which he said that Priscilla Winthrop was the first white child born on the town site. Her father was territorial judge, afterward member of the State Senate, and after ten years spent in mining in the far West, died in the seventies, the richest man in the State. It was known that he left Priscilla, his only child, half a million dollars in government bonds.

She was the first girl in our town to go away to school. Naturally, she went to Oberlin, famous in those days for admitting coloured students. But she finished her education at Vassar, and came back so much of a young lady that the town could hardly contain her. She married Mortimer Conklin, took him to the Centennial on a wedding trip, came home, rebuilt her father's house, covering it with towers and minarets and steeples, and scroll-saw fretwork, and christened it Winthrop Hall. She erected a store building on Main Street, that Mortimer

might have a luxurious office on the second floor, and then settled down to the serious business of life, which was building up a titled aristocracy in a Kansas town.

The Conklin children were never sent to the public schools, but had a governess, yet Mortimer Conklin, who was always alert for the call, could not understand why the people never summoned him to any office of honour or trust. He kept his brass signboard polished, went to his office punctually every morning at ten o'clock, and returned home to dinner at five, and made clients wait ten minutes in the outer office before they could see him—at least so both of them say, and there were no others in all the years. He shaved every day, wore a frock-coat and a high hat to church—where for ten years he was the only male member of the Episcopalian flock—and Mrs. Conklin told the women that altogether he was a credit to his sex and his family—a remark which was passed about ribaldly in town for a dozen years, though Mortimer Conklin never knew that he was the subject of a town joke. Once he rebuked a man in the barber shop for speaking of feminine ex-

travagance, and told the shop that he did not stint his wife, that when she asked him for money he always gave it to her without question, and that if she wanted a dress he told her to buy it and send the bill to him. And we are such a polite people that no one in the crowded shop laughed—until Mortimer Conklin went out.

Of course at the office we have known for twenty-five years what the men thought of Mortimer, but not until Miss Larrabee joined the force did we know that among the women Mrs. Conklin was considered an oracle. Miss Larrabee said that her mother has a legend that when Priscilla Winthrop brought home from Boston the first sealskin sacque ever worn in town she gave a party for it, and it lay in its box on the big walnut bureau in the spare room of the Conklin mansion in solemn state, while seventy-five women salaamed to it. After that Priscilla Winthrop was the town authority on sealskins. When any member of the town nobility had a new sealskin, she took it humbly to Priscilla Winthrop to pass judgment upon it. If Priscilla said it was London-dyed, its owner pranced

away on clouds of glory; but if she said it was American-dyed, its owner crawled away in shame, and when one admired the disgraced garment, the martyred owner smiled with resigned sweetness and said humbly: "Yes—but it's only American-dyed, you know."

No dervish ever questioned the curse of the priestess. The only time a revolt was imminent was in the autumn of 1884 when the Conklins returned from their season at Duxbury, Massachusetts, and Mrs. Conklin took up the carpets in her house, heroically sold all of them at the second-hand store, put in new waxed floors and spread down rugs. The town uprose and hooted; the outcasts and barbarians in the Methodist and Baptist Missionary Societies rocked the Conklin home with their merriment, and ten dervishes with set faces bravely met the onslaughts of the savages; but among themselves in hushed whispers, behind locked doors, the faithful wondered if there was not a mistake some place. However, when Priscilla Winthrop assured them that in all the best homes in Boston rugs were replacing carpets, their souls were at peace.

All this time we at the office knew nothing of what was going on. We knew that the Conklins devoted considerable time to society; but Alphabetical Morrison explained that by calling attention to the fact that Mrs. Conklin had prematurely grey hair. He said a woman with prematurely grey hair was as sure to be a social leader as a spotted horse is to join a circus. But now we know that Colonel Morrison's view was a superficial one, for he was probably deterred from going deeper into the subject by his dislike for Mortimer Conklin, who invested a quarter of a million dollars of the Winthrop fortune in the Wichita boom, and lost it. Colonel Morrison naturally thought as long as Conklin was going to lose that money he could have lost it just as well at home in the "Queen City of the Prairies," giving the Colonel a chance to win. And when Conklin, protecting his equities in Wichita, sent a hundred thousand dollars of good money after the quarter million of bad money, Colonel Morrison's grief could find no words; though he did find language for his wrath. When the Conklins draped their Oriental rugs for airing every Saturday over the

veranda and portico railings of the house front, Colonel Morrison accused the Conklins of hanging out their stamp collection to let the neighbours see it. This was the only side of the rug question we ever heard in our office until Miss Larrabee came; then she told us that one of the first requirements of a howling dervish was to be able to quote from Priscilla Winthrop's Rug book from memory. The Rug book, the China book and the Old Furniture book were the three sacred scrolls of the sect.

All this was news to us. However, through Colonel Morrison, we had received many years ago another sidelight on the social status of the Conklins. It came out in this way: Time honoured custom in our town allows the children of a home where there is an outbreak of social revelry, whether a church festival or a meeting of the Cold-Nosed Whist Club, to line up with the neighbour children on the back stoop or in the kitchen, like human vultures, waiting to lick the ice-cream freezer and to devour the bits of cake and chicken salad that are left over. Colonel Morrison told us that no child was ever known to adorn the back yard of the Conklin

home while a social cataclysm was going on, but that when Mrs. Morrison entertained the Ladies' Literary League, children from the holy Conklin family went home from his back porch with their faces smeared with chicken croquettes and their hands sticky with jellycake.

This story never gained general circulation in town, but even if it had been known of all men it would not have shaken the faith of the devotees. For they did not smile when Priscilla Winthrop began to refer to old Frank Hagan, who came to milk the Conklin cow and curry the Conklin horse, as "François, the man," or to call the girl who did the cooking and general housework "Cosette, the maid," though every one of the dozen other women in town whom "Cosette, the maid" had worked for knew that her name was Fanny Ropes. And shortly after that the homes of the rich and the great over on the hill above Main Street began to fill with Lisettes and Nanons and Fanchons, and Mrs. Julia Neal Worthington called her girl "Grisette," explaining that they had always had a Grisette about the house since her mother first went to housekeeping in Peoria, Illinois, and it

sounded so natural to hear the name that they always gave it to a new servant. This story came to the office through the Young Prince, who chuckled over it during the whole hour he consumed in writing Ezra Worthington's obituary.

Miss Larrabee says that the death of Ezra Worthington marks such a distinct epoch in the social life of the town that we must set down here—even if the narrative of the Conklins halts for a moment—how the Worthingtons rose and flourished. Julia Neal, eldest daughter of Thomas Neal—who lost the "O" before his name somewhere between the docks of Dublin and the west bank of the Missouri River—was for ten years principal of the ward school in that part of our town known as "Arkansaw," where her term of service is still remembered as the "reign of terror." It was said of her then that she could whip any man in the ward—and would do it if he gave her a chance. The same manner which made the neighbours complain that Julia Neal carried her head too high, later in life, when she had money to back it, gave her what the women of the State Federa-

tion called a "regal air." In her early thirties she married Ezra Worthington, bachelor, twenty year her senior. Ezra Worthington was at that time, had been for twenty years before, and continued to be until his death, proprietor of the Worthington Poultry and Produce Commission Company. He was owner of the stockyards, president of the Worthington State Bank, vice-president, treasurer and general manager of the Worthington Mercantile Company, and owner of five brick buildings on Main Street. He bought one suit of clothes every five years whether he needed it or not, never let go of a dollar until the Goddess of Liberty on it was black in the face, and died rated "Aa $350,000" by all the commercial agencies in the country. And the first thing Mrs. Worthington did after the funeral was to telephone to the bank and ask them to send her a hundred dollars.

The next important thing she did was to put a heavy, immovable granite monument over the deceased so that he would not be restless, and then she built what is known in our town as the Worthington Palace. It makes the Markley

mansion which cost $25,000 look like a barn The Worthingtons in the lifetime of Ezra had ventured no further into the social whirl of the town than to entertain the new Presbyterian preacher at tea, and to lend their lawn to the King's Daughters for a social, sending a bill in to the society for the eggs used in the coffee and the gasoline used in heating it.

To the howling dervishes who surrounded Priscilla Winthrop the Worthingtons were as mere Christian dogs. It was not until three years after Ezra Worthington's death that the glow of the rising Worthington sun began to be seen in the Winthrop mosque. During those three years Mrs. Worthington had bought and read four different sets of the best hundred books, had consumed the Chautauqua course, had prepared and delivered for the Social Science Club, which she organised, five papers ranging in subject from the home life of Rameses I., through a Survey of the Forces Dominating Michael Angelo, to the Influence of Esoteric Buddhism on Modern Political Tendencies. More than that, she had been elected president of the City Federation of Clubs, and, being a delegate to the Na-

tional Federation from the State, was talked of for the State Federation Presidency. When the State Federation met in our town, Mrs. Worthington gave a reception for the delegates in the Worthington Palace, a feature of which was a concert by a Kansas City organist on the new pipe-organ which she had erected in the music-room of her house, and despite the fact that the devotees of the Priscilla shrine said that the crowd was distinctly mixed and not at all representative of our best social grace and elegance, there is no question but that Mrs. Worthington's reception made a strong impression upon the best local society. The fact that, as Miss Larrabee said, "Priscilla Winthrop was so nice about it," also may be regarded as ominous. But the women who lent Mrs. Worthington the spoons and forks for the occasion were delighted, and formed a phalanx about her, which made up in numbers what it might have lacked in distinction. Yet while Mrs. Worthington was in Europe the faithful routed the phalanx, and Mrs. Conklin returned from her summer in Duxbury with half a carload of old furniture from Harrison Sampson's shop and

gave a talk to the priestesses of the inner temple on "Heppelwhite in New England."

Miss Larrabee reported the affair for our paper, giving the small list of guests and the long line of refreshments—which included alligator-pear salad, right out of the Smart Set Cook Book. Moreover, when Jefferson appeared in Topeka that fall, Priscilla Winthrop, who had met him through some of her Duxbury friends in Boston, invited him to run down for a luncheon with her and the members of the royal family who surrounded her. It was the proud boast of the defenders of the Winthrop faith in town that week, that though twenty-four people sat down to the table, not only did all the men wear frock-coats—not only did Uncle Charlie Haskins of String Town wear the old Winthrop butler's livery without a wrinkle in it, and with only the faint odour of mothballs to mingle with the perfume of the roses—but (and here the voices of the followers of the prophet dropped in awe) not a single knife or fork or spoon or napkin was borrowed! After that, when any of the sisterhood had occasion to speak of the absent Mrs. Worthington, whose

house was filled with new mahogany and brass furniture, they referred to her as the Duchess of Grand Rapids, which gave them much comfort.

But joy is short-lived. When Mrs. Worthington came back from Europe and opened her house to the City Federation, and gave a coloured lantern-slide lecture on "An evening with the Old Masters," serving punch from her own cut-glass punch bowl instead of renting the hand-painted crockery bowl of the queensware store, the old dull pain came back into the hearts of the dwellers in the inner circle. Then just in the nick of time Mrs. Conklin went to Kansas City and was operated on for appendicitis. She came back pale and interesting, and gave her club a paper called "Hospital Days," fragrant with odoform and Henley's poems. Miss Larrabee told us that it was almost as pleasant as an operation on one's self to hear Mrs. Conklin tell about hers. And they thought it was rather brutal—so Miss Larrabee afterward told us—when Mrs. Worthington went to the hospital one month, and gave her famous Delsarte lecture course the next month, and explained to the women that if she wasn't as heavy as she

used to be it was because she had had everything cut out of her below the windpipe. It seemed to the temple priestesses that, considering what a serious time poor dear Priscilla Winthrop had gone through, Mrs. Worthington was making light of serious things.

There is no doubt that the formal rebellion of Mrs. Worthington, Duchess of Grand Rapids, and known of the town's nobility as the Pretender, began with the hospital contest. The Pretender planted her siege-guns before the walls of the temple of the priestess, and prepared for business. The first manœuvre made by the beleaguered one was to give a luncheon in the mosque, at which, though it was midwinter, fresh tomatoes and fresh strawberries were served, and a real authoress from Boston talked upon John Fiske's philosophy and, in the presence of the admiring guests, made a new kind of salad dressing for the fresh lettuce and tomatoes. Thirty women who watched her forgot what John Fiske's theory of the cosmos is, and thirty husbands who afterward ate that salad dressing have learned to suffer and be strong. But that salad dressing undermined the faith of

thirty mere men—raw outlanders to be sure—in the social omniscience of Priscilla Winthrop. Of course they did not see it made; the spell of the enchantress was not over them; but in their homes they maintained that if Priscilla Winthrop didn't know any more about cosmic philosophy than to pay a woman forty dollars to make a salad dressing like that—and the whole town knows that was the price—the vaunted town of Duxbury, Massachusetts, with its old furniture and new culture, which Priscilla spoke of in such repressed ecstasy, is probably no better than Manitou, Colorado, where they get their Indian goods from Buffalo, New York.

Such is the perverse reasoning of man. And Mrs. Worthington, having lived with considerable of a man for fifteen years, hearing echoes of this sedition, attacked the fortification of the faithful on its weakest side. She invited the thirty seditious husbands with their wives to a beefsteak dinner, where she heaped their plates with planked sirloin, garnished the sirloin with big, fat, fresh mushrooms, and topped off the meal with a mince pie of her own concoction,

which would make a man leave home to follow it. She passed cigars at the table, and after the guests went into the music-room ten old men with ten old fiddles appeared and contested with old-fashioned tunes for a prize, after which the company danced four quadrilles and a Virginia reel. The men threw down their arms going home and went over in a body to the Pretender. But in a social conflict men are mere non-combatants, and their surrender did not seriously injure the cause that they deserted.

The war went on without abatement. During the spring that followed the winter of the beefsteak dinner many skirmishes, minor engagements, ambushes and midnight raids occurred. But the contest was not decisive. For purposes of military drill, the defenders of the Winthrop faith formed themselves into a Whist Club. *The* Whist Club they called it, just as they spoke of Priscilla Winthrop's gowns as "the black and white one," "the blue brocade," "the white china silk," as if no other black and white or blue brocade or white china silk gowns had been created in the world before and could not be made again by human hands. So, in the

language of the inner sanctuary, there was "The Whist Club," to the exclusion of all other possible human Whist Clubs under the stars. When summer came the Whist Club fled as birds to the mountains—save Priscilla Winthrop, who went to Duxbury, and came home with a brass warming-pan and a set of Royal Copenhagen china that were set up as holy objects in the temple.

But Mrs. Worthington went to the National Federation of Women's Clubs, made the acquaintance of the women there who wore clothes from Paris, began tracing her ancestry back to the Maryland Calverts—on her mother's side of the house—brought home a membership in the Daughters of the Revolution, the Colonial Dames and a society which referred to Charles I. as "Charles Martyr," claimed a Stuart as the rightful king of England, affecting to scorn the impudence of King Edward in sitting on another's throne. More than this, Mrs. Worthington had secured the promise of Mrs. Ellen Vail Montgomery, Vice-President of the National Federation, to visit Cliff Crest, as Mrs. Worthington called the Worthington mansion,

and she turned up her nose at those who worshipped under the towers, turrets and minarets of the Conklin mosque, and played the hose of her ridicule on their outer wall that she might have it spotless for a target when she got ready to raze it with her big gun.

The week that Ellen Vail Montgomery came to town was a busy one for Miss Larrabee. We turned over the whole fourth page of the paper to her for a daily society page, and charged the Bee Hive and the White Front Dry Goods store people double rates to put their special sale advertisements on that page while the "National Vice," as the Young Prince called her, was in town. For the "National Vice" brought the State President and two State Vices down, also four District Presidents and six District Vices, who, as Miss Larrabee said, were monsters "of so frightful a mien, that to be hated need but to be seen." The entire delegation of visiting stateswomen—Vices and Virtues and Beatitudes as we called them—were entertained by Mrs. Worthington at Cliff Crest, and there was so much Federation politics going on in our town that the New York *Sun* took five

hundred words about it by wire, and Colonel Alphabetical Morrison said that with all those dressed-up women about he felt as though he was living in a Sunday supplement.

The third day of the ghost-dance at Cliff Crest was to be the day of the big event—as the office parlance had it. The ceremonies began at sunrise with a breakfast to which half a dozen of the captains and kings of the besieging host of the Pretender were bidden. It seems to have been a modest orgy, with nothing more astonishing than a new gold-band china set to dishearten the enemy. By ten o'clock Priscilla Winthrop and the Whist Club had recovered from that; but they had been asked to the luncheon —the star feature of the week's round of gayety. It is just as well to be frank, and say that they went with fear and trembling. Panic and terror were in their ranks, for they knew a crisis was at hand. It came when they were "ushered into the dining-hall," as our paper so grandly put it, and saw in the great oak-beamed room a table laid on the polished bare wood—a table laid for forty-eight guests, with a doily for every plate, and every glass, and every salt-cellar, and—here

the mosque fell on the heads of the howling dervishes—forty-eight soup-spoons, forty-eight silver-handled knives and forks; forty-eight butter-spreaders, forty-eight spoons, forty-eight salad forks, forty-eight ice-cream spoons, forty-eight coffee spoons. Little did it avail the beleaguered party to peep slyly under the spoon-handles—the word "Sterling" was there, and, more than that, a large, severely plain "W" with a crest glared up at them from every piece of silver. The service had not been rented. They knew their case was hopeless. And so they ate in peace.

When the meal was over it was Mrs. Ellen Vail Montgomery, in her thousand-dollar gown, worshipped by the eyes of forty-eight women, who put her arm about Priscilla Winthrop and led her into the conservatory, where they had "a dear, sweet quarter of an hour," as Mrs. Montgomery afterward told her hostess. In that dear, sweet quarter of an hour Priscilla Winthrop Conklin unbuckled her social sword and handed it to the conqueror, in that she agreed absolutely with Mrs. Montgomery that Mrs. Worthington was "perfectly lovely," that she was "delighted to be of any service" to

Mrs. Worthington; that Mrs. Conklin "was sure no one else in our town was so admirably qualified for "National Vice" as Mrs. Worthington, and that "it would be such a privilege" for Mrs. Conklin to suggest Mrs. Worthington's name for the office. And then Mrs. Montgomery, "National Vice" and former State Secretary for Vermont of the Colonial Dames, kissed Priscilla Winthrop and they came forth wet-eyed and radiant, holding each other's hands. When the company had been hushed by the magic of a State Vice and two District Virtues, Priscilla Winthrop rose and in the sweetest Kansas Bostonese told the ladies that she thought this an eminently fitting place to let the visiting ladies know how dearly our town esteems its most distinguished townswoman, Mrs. Julia Neal Worthington, and that entirely without her solicitation, indeed quite without her knowledge, the women of our town—and she hoped of our beloved State—were ready now to announce that they were unanimous in their wish that Mrs. Worthington should be National Vice-President of the Federation of Women's Clubs, and that she, the speaker, had entered the

contest with her whole soul to bring this end to pass. Then there was hand-clapping and handkerchief waving and some tears, and a little good, honest Irish hugging, and in the twilight two score of women filed down through the formal garden of Cliff Crest and walked by twos and threes into the town.

There was the usual clatter of home-going wagons; lights winked out of kitchen windows; the tinkle of distant cow-bells was in the air; on Main Street the commerce of the town was gently ebbing, and man and nature seemed utterly oblivious of the great event that had happened. The course of human events was not changed; the great world rolled on, while Priscilla Winthrop went home to a broken shrine to sit among the potsherds.

XV

"And Yet a Fool"

THE exchanges that come to a country newspaper like ours become familiar friends as the years pass. One who reads these papers regularly comes to know them even in their wrappers, though to an unpracticed eye the wrappers seem much alike. But when he has been poking his thumb through the paper husks in a certain pile every morning for a score of years, he knows by some sort of prescience when a new paper appears; and, when the pile looks odd to him, he goes hunting for the stranger and is not happy until he has found it.

One morning this spring the stranger stuck its head from the bottom of the exchange pile, and when we had glanced at the handwriting of the address and at the one-cent stamp on the cover we knew it had been mailed to us by some-

one besides the publisher. For the newspaper "hand" is as definite a form of writing as the legal hand or the doctor's. The paper proved to be an Arizona newspaper full of saloon advertising, restaurant cards, church and school meeting notices, local items about the sawmill and the woman's club, land notices and paid items from wool dealers. On the local page in the midst of a circle of red ink was the announcement of the death of Horace P. Sampson. Every month we get notices like this, of the deaths of old settlers who have gone to the ends of the earth, but this notice was peculiar in that it said:

"One year ago our lamented townsman deposited with the firm of Cross & Kurtz, the popular undertakers and dealers in Indian goods and general merchandise, $100 to cover his funeral expenses, and another hundred to provide that a huge boulder be rolled over his grave on which he desired the following unusual inscription: '*Horace P. Sampson, Born Dec.* 6, 1840, *and died* ——. *"And is not this a rare fellow, my lord? He's good at anything and yet a fool."*'"

We handed the paper to Alphabetical Morrison, who happened to be in the office at the time, pawing through the discarded exchanges in the waste-basket, looking for his New York *Sun,* and, after Colonel Morrison had read the item, he began drumming with his fingernails on the chair-seat between his knees. His eyes were full of dreams and no one disturbed him as he looked off into space. Finally he sighed:

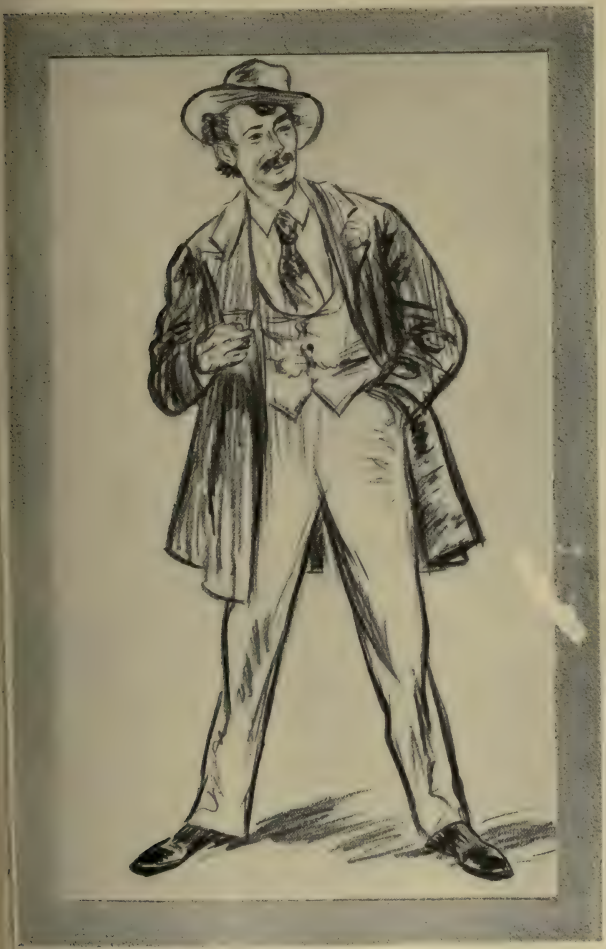
"And yet a fool—a motley fool! Poor old Samp—kept it up to the end! I take it from the guarded way the paper refers to his faults, 'as who of us have not,' that he died of the tremens or something like that." The Colonel paused and smiled just perceptibly, and went on: "Yet I see that he was a good fellow to the end. I notice that the Shriners and the Elks and the Eagles and the Hoo-hoos buried him. Nary an insurance order in his! Poor old Samp; he certainly went all the gaits!"

We suggested that Colonel Morrison write something about the deceased for the paper, but though the Colonel admitted that he knew Sampson "like a book," there was no persuading Morrison to write the obituary.

"After some urging and by way of compromise," he said, "I'm perfectly willing to give you fellows the facts and let you fix up what you please."

Because the reporters were both busy we called the stenographer, and had the Colonel's story taken down as he told it—to be rewritten into an obituary later. And it is what he said and not what we printed about Sampson that is worth putting down here. The Colonel took the big leather chair, locked his hands behind his head, and began:

"Let me see. Samp was born, as he says, December 6, 1840, in Wisconsin, and came out to Kansas right after the war closed. He was going to college up there, and at the second call for troops he led the whole senior class into forming a company, and enlisted before graduation and fought from that time on till the close of the war. He was a captain, I think, but you never heard him called that. When he came here he'd been admitted to the bar and was a good lawyer—a mighty good lawyer for that time—and had more business 'n a bird pup with a gum-shoe. He was just a boy then, and, like



" He made a lot of money and blew it in "

all boys, he enjoyed a good time. He drank more or less in the army—they all did 's far as that goes—but he kept it up in a desultory way after he came here, as a sort of accessory to his main business of life, which was being a good fellow.

"And he was a good fellow—an awful good fellow. We were all young then; there wasn't an old man on the town-site as I remember it. We use to load up the whole bunch and go hunting—closing up the stores and taking the girls along—and did not show up till midnight. Samp would always have a little something to take under his buggy-seat, and we would wet up and sing coming home, with the beds of the spring-wagons so full of prairie chickens and quail that they jolted out at every rut. Samp would always lead the singing—being just a mite more lubricated than the rest of us, and the girls thought he was all hunkey dorey —as they used to say.

"He made a lot of money and blew it in at Jim Thomas's saloon, buying drinks, playing stud poker, betting on quarter horses, and lending it out to fellows who helped him forget

they'd borrowed it. And—say in two or three years, after the chicken-hunting set had married off, and begun in a way to settle down—Samp took up with the next set coming on; he married and got the prettiest girl in town. We always thought that he married only because he wanted to be a good fellow and did not wish to be impolite to the girl he'd paired off with in the first crowd. Still he didn't stay home nights, and once or twice a year—say, election or Fourth of July—he and a lot of other young fellows would go out and tip over all the board sidewalks in town, and paint funny signs on the store buildings and stack beer bottles on the preacher's front porch, and raise Ned generally. And the fellows of his age, who owned the stores and were in nights, would say to Samp when they saw him coming down about noon the next day:

"'Go it when you're young Samp, for when you're old you can't.' And he would wink at 'em, give 'em ten dollars apiece for their damages and jolly his way down the street to his office.

"Now, you mustn't get the idea that Samp

was the town drunkard, for he never was. He was just a good fellow. When the second set of young fellows outgrew him and settled down, he picked up with the third, and his wife's brown alpaca began to be noticed more or less among the women. But Samp's practice didn't seem to fall off—it only changed. He didn't have so much real estate lawing and got more criminal practice. Gradually he became a criminal lawyer, and his fame for wit and eloquence extended over all the State. When a cow-puncher got in trouble his folks in the East always gave Samp a big fee to get the boy out, and he did it. When he went to any other county-seat besides our own to try a case, the fellows—and you know who the fellows are in a town—the fellows knew that while Samp was in town there would be something going on with 'fireworks in the evening.' For he was a great fellow for a good time, and the dining-room girls at the hotel used to giggle in the kitchen for a week after he was gone at the awful things he would say to 'em. He knew more girls by their first names than a drummer."

Colonel Morrison chuckled and crossed his fat legs at the ankles as he continued, after lighting the cigar we gave him:

"Well, along in the late seventies we fellows that he started out with got to owning our own homes and getting on in the world. That was the time when Samp should have been grubbing at his law books, but nary a grub for him. He was playing horse for dear life. And right there the fellows all left him behind. Some were buying real estate for speculation; some running for office; some starting a bank; and others lending money at two per cent. a month, and leading in the prayer-meeting. So Samp kind of hitched up his ambition and took the slack out of his habits for a few months and went to the legislature. They say that he certainly did have a good time, though, when he got there. They remember that session yet up there, and call it the year of the great flood, for the nights they were filled with music, as the poet says, and from the best accounts we could get the days were devoid of ease also, and how Mrs. Sampson stood it the women never could find out, for, of course, she must have known all about

it, though he wouldn't let her come near Topeka. He began to get pursy and red-faced, and was clicking it off with his fifth set of young fellows. It took a big slug of whisky to set off his oratory, but when he got it wound up he surely could pull the feathers out of the bird of freedom to beat scandalous. But as a stump speaker you weren't always sure he'd fill the engagement. He could make a jury blubber and clench its fists at the prosecuting attorney, yet he didn't claim to know much law, and he did turn over all the work in the Supreme Court to his partner, Charley Hedrick. Then, when Charley was practising before the Supreme Court and wasn't here to hold him down, Samp would get out and whoop it up with the boys, quote Shakespeare and make stump speeches on drygoods boxes at midnight, and put his arms around old Marshal Furgeson's neck and tell him he was the blooming flower of chivalry. Also women made a fool of him—more or less.

"Where was I?" asked Colonel Morrison of the stenographer when she had finished sharpening her pencil. "Oh, yes, along in the

eighties came the boom, and Samp tried to ge in it and make some money. He seems to hav tried to catch up with us fellows of his age and he began to plunge. He got in debt, and when the boom broke, he was still living in rented house with the rent ten months behind his partnership was gone and his practice wa cut down to joint-keepers, gamblers, and th farmers who hadn't heard the stories of hi financial irregularities that were floating aroun town.

"Yet his wife stuck to him, forever explain ing to my wife that he would be all right whe he settled down. But he continued to soak up little—not much, but a little. He never wa drunk in the daytime, but I remember ther used to be mornings when his office smelle pretty sour. I had an office next to his for a whil and he used to come in and talk to me a goo deal. The young fellows around town whor he would like to run with were beginning t find him stupid, and the old fellows—excep me—were busy and he had no one to loaf with He decided, I remember, several times to brac up, and once he kept white shirts, cuffs an

collars on for nearly a year. But when Harrison was elected, he filled up from his shoes to his hat and didn't go home for three days. One day after that, when he had gone back to his flannel shirts and dirty collars, he was sitting in my office looking at the fire in the big box stove when he broke out with:

"'Alphabetical—what's the matter with me, anyway? This town sends men to Congress; it makes Supreme Court judges of others. It sends fellows to Kansas City as rich bankers. It makes big merchants out of grocery clerks. Fortune just naturally flirts with everyone in town—but never a wink do I get. I know and you know I'm smarter than those jays. I can teach your Congressman economics, and your Supreme judge law. I can think up more schemes than the banker, and can beat the merchant in any kind of a game he'll name. I don't lie and I don't steal and I ain't stuck up. What's the matter with me, anyway?'

"And of course," mused Colonel Morrison as he relighted the butt of his cigar, "of course I had to lie to him and say I didn't know. But I did. We all knew. He was too much of a

good fellow. His failure to get on bothered him a good deal, and one day he got roaring full and went up and down town telling people how smart he was. Then his pride left him, and he let his whiskers grow frowsy and used his vest for a spittoon, and his eyes watered too easily for a man still in his forties.

"He went West a dozen years ago, about the time of Cleveland's second election, expecting to get a job in Arizona and grow up with the country. His wife was mighty happy, and she told our folks and the rest of the women that when Horace got away from his old associates in this town she knew that he would be all right. Poor Myrtle Kenwick, the prettiest girl you ever saw along in the sixties—and she was through here not long ago and stayed with my wife and the girls—a broken old woman going back to her kinfolk in Iowa after she left him. Poor Myrtle! I wonder where she is. I see this Arizona paper doesn't say anything about her."

Colonel Morrison read over the item again and smiled as he proceeded:

"But it does say that he occupied many places

of honour and trust in his former home in Kansas, which seems to indicate that whisky made old Samp a liar as well as a loafer at last. My, my!" sighed the Colonel as he rose and put the paper on the desk. "My, my! What a treacherous serpent it is! It gave him a good time—literally a hell of a good time. And he was a good fellow—literally a damned good fellow—'damned from here to eternity,' as your man Kipling says. God gave him every talent. He might have been a respected, useful citizen; no honour was beyond him; but he put aside fame and worth and happiness to play with whisky. My Lord, just think of it!" exclaimed the Colonel as he reached for his hat and put up his glasses. "And this is how whisky served him: brought him to shame, wrecked his home, made his name a by-word, and lured him on and on to utter ruin by holding before him the phantom of a good time. What a pitiful, heart-breaking mocker it is!" He sighed a long sigh as he stood in the door looking up at the sky with his hands clasped behind him, and said half audibly as he went down the steps: "And whoso is deceived thereby is not wise—not

wise. 'He's good at anything—and yet a fool'!"

That was what Colonel Morrison gave the stenographer. What we made for the paper is entirely uninteresting and need not be printed here.

XVI

A Kansas "Childe Roland"

ONE of the wisest things ever said about the newspaper business was said by the late J. Sterling Morton, of Nebraska. He declared that a newspaper's enemies were its assets, and the newspaper's liabilities its friends. This is particularly true of a country newspaper. For instance, witness the ten-years' struggle of our own little paper to get rid of the word "Hon." as a prefix to the names of politicians. Everyone in town used to laugh at us for referring to whippersnapper statesmen as "Honourable"; because everyone in town knew that for the most part these whippersnappers were entirely dishonourable. It was easy enough to stop calling our enemies "Hon.," for they didn't dare to complain; but if we dropped the title even from so mangy a man as Abner Handy, within a week Charley

Hedrick would happen into the office with twenty or thirty dollars' worth of legal printing and after doing us so important a favour would pause before going out to say:

"Boys, what you fellows got against Ab Handy?" And the ensuing dialogue would conclude from old Charley: "Well, I know—I know—but Ab likes it, and it really isn't much and I know he's a fool about it; I don't care in my own case, but if you can do it I kind of wish you would. Ab's funny that way; he's never given up. He's like the fellow old Browning tells about who has 'august anticipations of a dim splendour ever on before,' and when you fellows quit calling him 'Hon.' it makes him blue."

And old Charley would grow purple with a big, wheezy, asthmatic laugh, and shake his great six-foot hulk and toddle out leaving us vanquished. For though the whole town reviles Abner Handy, Charley Hedrick still looks after him.

It was said for thirty years that Handy did old Charley's dirty work in politics, but we knew many of the mean things that Handy did were

unjustly charged to Hedrick. People in a small community are apt to put two and two together and make five. Much of the talk about the alliance between Hedrick and Handy is, of course, down-right slander; every lawyer who tries lawsuits for forty years in a country town is bound to make enemies of small-minded people, many of whom occupy large places in the community, and a small-minded man, believing that his enemy is a villain, makes up his facts to suit his belief, and then peddles his story. It is always just as well to discount the home stories on an old lawyer ninety-five per cent. if they are bad; and seventy per cent. if they are good—for he may have saved the fellow who is telling them from the penitentiary. But Abner Handy was never enough of a lawyer to come within this rule. Indeed they used to say that he was not admitted to the bar, at all, but that when he came to town, in 1871, he erased his dead brother's name on a law diploma and substituted his own. Still, he practised on the law—as Simon Mehronay used to say of Handy—and for twenty years carried an advertisement in Eastern farm journals proclaiming that his

specialty was Kansas collections. He never took as a fee less than ninety-five per cent. of the amount he collected. That was the advantage which he had as a lawyer, which advantage inspired Colonel Alphabetical Morrison to proclaim that a lawyer's diploma is nothing but a license to steal; upon hearing which Charley Hedrick sent back to the Colonel the retort that it would take two legal diplomas working day and night to keep up with the Colonel's more or less honest endeavours.

Now Ab Handy was a lean coyote, who was forever licking his bruises, and some ten years later he tried to run for the school board solely to get the Colonel's daughters dismissed as school-teachers. It was his boast that he never forgot a foe; and for twenty years after Hedrick saved Handy from going to jail for robbing a cattleman of a thousand dollars in "Red" Martin's gambling-room, the only good thing the town knew of Handy was that he never forgot a friend.

During that twenty years whenever, to further his ends in a primary or in an election, Charley Hedrick needed the votes of the rough

element that gathered about our little town, Abner Handy, card-sharper and jack-leg lawyer, would go forth into the byways and alleys and gather them in. For this service, when Hedrick carried the county—which was about four times out of five—Handy was rewarded by being put on the delegation to the State convention. Thus he made his beginning in State politics. The second time that he attended a State convention Handy swelled up in his Sunday clothes, and by reason of his slight acquaintance with the manipulators of State politics, began to patronise the other members of our delegation—good, honest men, whose contempt for him at home was unspeakable; but when they huddled like sheep in the strange crowd at the convention they often accepted Handy as a guide in important matters. In talking with the home delegation Handy very soon began speaking of the convention leaders familiarly as "Jim" and "Dick" and "Tawm" and "Bill," and sometimes Handy brought one of these dignitaries to the rooms of our delegation and introduced him to our people with a grand flourish. Every time the legislature met, Ab Handy was a clerk in

it, and, if he was a clerk of an important committee like the railroad committee or the committee on the calendar, he invariably came home with a few hundred dollars, three suits of clothes and a railroad pass. No one but Charley Hedrick could live with him for six months afterward.

It was when he returned from one of these profitable sessions that Abner Handy and Nora Sinclair were married. The affinity between them was this: his good clothes and proud manner caught her; and her social position caught him. Everyone in town knew, however, that Nora Sinclair had been too smart for Handy. She had him hooked through the gills before he knew that he was more than nibbling at the bait. The town concurred with Colonel Morrison—our only townsman who travelled widely in those days—when he put it succinctly: "Ab Handy is Nora Sinclair's last call for the dining-car."

Her influence on Abner Handy and his life was such that it is necessary to record something of the kind of a woman she was before he met her. A woman of the right sort might

have made a man of Handy, even that late in life. Strong, good women have made weak men fairly strong, but such women were never girls like Nora. She was a nice enough little girl until she became boy-struck—as our vernacular puts it. Her mother thought this development of the child was "so cute," and told callers about the boys who came to see Nora—before she was twelve. In those days, and in some old-fashioned families in our town, little girls were asked to run out to play when the neighbours had to be discussed. But Mrs. Sinclair claimed Nora was "neither sugar nor salt nor anybody's honey," and everything was talked over before the child. We knew at the office from Colonel Morrison that his little girls did not play at the Sinclairs'. Her mother put long dresses and picture hats upon her and pushed her out into society, and the whole town knew that Nora was a mature woman, in all her instincts, by the time she was sixteen. Her mother, moreover, was manifestly proud that the child wasn't "one of those long-legged, gangling tom-boy girls, who seem so backward" and wear pigtails and chew slate pencils and dream.

The gilded youths who boarded at the Hotel Metropole began to notice her. That pleased her mother also, and she said to the mothers of other little girls of Nora's age who were climbing fences and wiping dishes: "You know Nora is so popular with the gentlemen." When the girl was seventeen she was engaged. She kept a town fellow and had a college fellow. She acquired a "gentleman friend" in Kansas City who gave her expensive presents. These her mother took great joy in displaying, and never objected when he stayed after eleven o'clock; for she thought he was "such a good catch" and such a "swell young man." But Nora shooed him off the front porch in the summer following, because he objected to her having two or three other eleven o'clock fellows. She said he was "selfish, and would not let her have a good time." At nineteen she knew more about matters that were none of her business than most women know on their wedding day, and the boys said that she was soft. Every time that Nora left town she came back with two or three correspondents. She perfumed her stationery, used a seal, adopted all the latest frills, and

learned to write an angular hand. At twenty she was going with the young married set, and was invited out to the afternoon card clubs. She was known as a dashing girl at this time, and travelling men in three States knew about her. Her mother used to send personal items to our office telling of their exalted business positions and announcing their visits to the Sinclair home. There was more or less talk about Nora in a quiet way, but her mother said that "it is because the other girls don't know how to wear their clothes as well as Nora does," and that "when a girl has a fine figure—which few enough girls in this town have, Heaven knows—why, she is a fool if she doesn't make the most of herself."

Then, gradually, Nora went to seed. She became a faded, hard-faced woman, and all the sisters in town warned their brothers against her. She was invited out only when there was a crowd. She took up with the boys of the younger set, and the married women of her own age called her the kidnapper. She was a social joke. About once a year a strange man would show up in her parlour, and she kept up the illusion about being engaged. But in the office

we shared the town's knowledge that her harp was on the willows. She was massaging her face at twenty-six and her mother was sniffing at the town and saying that there were no social advantages to be had here. She and the girl went to the Lakes every summer, and Nora always came home declaring that she had had the time of her life, and that she met so many lovely gentlemen. But that was all there was to it, and in the end it was Abner Handy or no one.

After their wedding, Nora and Abner Handy set about the business of making politics pay. That is a difficult thing to do in a country town, where every voter is a watchdog of the county and city treasuries. Abner gave up his gambling, he and his wife joined all the lodges in town, and she dragged him into that coterie of people known as Society. She joined a woman's club, and was always anxious to be appointed on the soliciting committee when the women had any public work to do; so when the library needed books, or the trash cans at the street corners needed paint, or the park trees needed trimming, or the new hospital needed an additional bed, or the band needed new uni-

forms, Mrs. Handy might be seen on the streets with two or three women of a much better social status than she had, making it clear that she was a public-spirited woman and that she moved in the best circles. Whereupon Abner Handy got work in the courthouse—as a deputy, or as a clerk, or as an under-sheriff, or as a juror—and when the legislature met he went to Topeka as a clerk.

No one knew how they lived, but they did live. Every two years they gave a series of parties, and the splendour of these festivals made the town exclaim in one voice: "Well, *how* do they do it?" But Mrs. Handy, who was steaming the wrinkles out of her face, and assuming more or less kittenish airs in her late thirties, never offered the town an explanation. "Hers not to answer why, hers not to make reply, hers but to do and dye" was the way Colonel Morrison put it the day after Mrs. Handy swooped down into Main Street with a golden yellow finish on her hair. She walked serenely between Mrs. Frelinghuysen and Mrs. Priscilla Winthrop Conklin. They were begging for funds with which to furnish a rest room for farmers'

wives. And when they bore down on our office, Colonel Morrison folded his papers in his bosom and passed them on the threshold as one hurrying to a fire in the roof of his own house. It was interesting to observe, when the Federation Committee called on us that day, that Mrs. Handy did all the talking. She was as full of airs and graces as an actress, and ogled with her glassy eyes, and put on a sweet babyish innocence of the ways of business and of men—as though men were a race apart, greatly to be feared because they ate up little girls. But she got her dollar before she left the office, and George Kirwin, who happened to be in the front room at the time waiting for a proof, said he thought that the performance and the new hair were worth the price.

Five years passed and in each year Mrs. Handy had found some artificial way of deluding herself that she was cheating time. Then Charley Hedrick, who needed a vote in the legislature, and was too busy to go there himself, nominated Abner Handy and elected him to a seat in the lower house. The thing that Hedrick needed was not important—merely

the creation of a new judicial district which would remove an obnoxious district judge in an adjoining county from our district, and leave our county in a district by itself. Hedrick hated the judge, and Hedrick used Handy's vote for trading purposes with other statesmen desiring similar small matters and got the district remade as he desired it.

When the Handys started to Topeka for the opening of the session, they began to inflame with importance as the train whistled for the junction east of town, and by the time they actually arrived at Topeka they were so highly swollen that they could not get into a boarding-house door, but went to the best hotel, and engaged rooms at seven dollars a day. The town gasped for two days and then began to laugh and wink. Two weeks after their arrival at the State capital, Abner Handy had been made chairman of the joint committee on the calendar, second member of the judiciary committee and member of the railroad committee, and Mrs. Handy had established credit at a Topeka drygoods store and was going it blind. She gave her hair an extra dip, and used to come

sailing down the corridors of the hotel in gorgeous silk house-gowns with ridiculous trains, and never appeared at breakfast without her diamonds. Before the session was well under way she had been to Kansas City to have her face enameled and had told the other "ladies of the hotel," as the wives of members of the legislature stopping at the hotel were called, that Topeka stores offered such a poor selection; she confided to them that Mr. Handy always wore silk nightshirts, and that she was unable to find anything in town that he would put on. She regarded herself as a charmer, and made great eyes at all the important lobbyists, to whom she put on her baby voice and manner and said that she thought politics were just simply awful, and added that if she were a man she would show them how honest a politician could be, but she wasn't, and when Abner tried to explain it to her it made her head ache, and all she wanted him to do was to help his friends, and she would add coyly: "I'm going to see that he helps you—whatever he does."

Every bill that had a dollar in it was held at the bottom of the calendar until satisfac-

tory arrangements were made with Abner Handy and his friends. When the legislative buccaneers under the black flag, sailed after an insurance company, their bill remained at the bottom of the calendar in one house or the other until Ab Handy had been seen, and no one could find out why. And so, in spite of our dislike of the man, our paper was forced to acknowledge that Handy was a house leader. Although he had never had a dozen cases above the police court, he came back at the end of the session with the local attorneyship of two railroads, and was chairman of a house committee to investigate the taxes paid by the railroads in the various counties. This gave him a year's work, so he rented an office in the Worthington block and hired a stenographer. Of course, we knew in town how Ab Handy had made his money. But he paid so many of his old debts, and dispensed so many favours with such a lordly hand, that it was hard to stir local sentiment against him. He donned the clothes of a "prominent citizen," and in discussing public affairs assumed an owlish manner that impressed his former associates, and fooled stupid

people, who began to believe that they had been harbouring a statesman unawares. But Charley Hedrick only grinned when men talked to him of the rise of Handy, and replied to the complaints of the scrupulous that Ab was no worse than he had always been, and if he was making it pay better, no one was poorer for his prosperity but Ab himself, and added: "Certainly he is a sincere spender." One day when Handy appeared on the street in a particularly fiery red necktie, Hedrick got him in a crowd, and began: "Just for a handful of silver he left us—just for a riband to stick in his coat." And when the crowd laughed with the joker, Hedrick continued in his thick, gravy-coated voice: "Old Browning's the boy. You fellows that want Shakespeare can have him; but Ab here knows that I take a little dash of Browning in mine. Since Ab's got to be a statesman, he's bought all of Webster's works and is learning 'em by heart. But"—and here Hedrick chuckled and shook his fat sides before letting out the joke which he enjoyed so much—"I says to Ab: as old Browning says, what does 'the fine felicity and flower of wickedness'

like you need with Webster; what you want to commit to memory is the penal statutes." And he threw back his head and gurgled down in his abdomen, while the crowd roared and Handy showed the wool in his teeth with a dog-like grin.

No other man in town would have dared that with Handy after he became a statesman; but we figured it out in the office that old Charley Hedrick was merely exhibiting his brand on Ab Handy to show the town that his title to Handy was still good. For though there was considerable of the King Cole about Hedrick—in that he was a merry old soul—he was always king, and he insisted on having his divine right to rule the politics of the county unquestioned. That was his vanity and he knew it, and was not ashamed of it.

He was the best lawyer in the State in those days, and one of the best in the West. Ten months in the year he paid no attention to politics, pendulating daily between his house and his office. Often, being preoccupied with his work, he would go the whole length of Main Street speaking to no one. When a tangled case

was in his mind he would enter his office in the morning, roll up his desk top, and dig into his work without speaking to a soul until, about the middle of the morning, he would look up from his desk to say as though he had just left off speaking: "Jim, hand me that 32 Kansas report over there on the table." When he worked, law books sprang up around him and sprawled over his desk and lay half open on chairs and tables near him until he had found his point; then he would get up and begin rollicking, slamming books together, cleaning up his debris and playing like a great porpoise with the litter he had made. At such times—and, indeed, all the time unless he was in what he called a "legal trance"—Hedrick was bubbling with good spirits, and when he left his office for politics he could get out in his shirt-sleeves at a primary and peddle tickets, or nose up and down the street like a fat ferret looking for votes. So when Abner Handy announced that he desired to go to the State Senate, to fill an unexpired term for two years, he had Hedrick behind him to give strength and respectability to his candidacy. Between the two Handy won. That was before the

days of reform, when it was supposed to be considerable of a virtue for a man to stand by his friend; and, being a lawyer, Hedrick naturally had the lawyer's view that no man is guilty until the jury is in, and its findings have been reviewed by the supreme court.

So Senator and Mrs. Senator Handy—as the town put it—went to Topeka as grandly as ever "Childe Roland to the dark tower came" —to use Hedrick's language. "No one ever has been able to find out what Roland was up to when he went to the dark tower, but," continued Hedrick, "with Ab and his child-wonder it will be different. She isn't taking all that special scenery along in her trunks for nothing. Ab has stumbled on to this great truth—that clothes may not make the man, but they make the crook!"

Handy drew a dark brow when he became a Senator, and made a point of trying to look ominous. He carried his chin tilted up at an angle of forty-five degrees, and spoke of the most obvious things with an air of mystery. He never admitted anything; his closest approach to committing himself on even so apparent a

proposition as the sunrise, was that it had risen "ostensibly"; he became known to the reporters as "Old Ostensible."

It was his habit to tiptoe around the Senate chamber whispering to other Senators, and then having sat down to rise suddenly as though some great impulse had come to him and hurry into the cloakroom. He inherited the chairmanship of the railroad committee, and all employees came to him for their railroad passes; so he was the god of the blue-bottle flies of politics that feed on legislatures, and buzz pompously about the capitol doing nothing, at three dollars a day. In that session Handy was for the "peepul." He patronised the State Shippers' Association, and told their committee that he would give them a better railroad bill than they were asking. His practice was to commit to memory a bill that he was about to introduce and then go into his committee-room, when it was full of loafers, and pretend to dictate it offhand to the stenographer, section by section without pausing. It was an impressive performance, and gained Handy the reputation of being brainy. But we at home who knew

Handy were not impressed; and, in our office, we knew that he was the same Ab Handy who once did business with a marked deck; who cheated widows and orphans; who sold bogus bonds; who got on two sides of lawsuits, and whose note was never good at any bank unless backed by blackmail.

When the session closed Abner Handy came home, a statesman with views on the tariff, and ostentatiously displayed his thousand-dollar bills. The Handys spent the summer in Atlantic City, and Abner came home wearing New York clothes of an exaggerated type, and though he never showed it in our town, they used to say that he put on a high hat when the train whistled for Topeka. Also we heard that the first time Mrs. Handy appeared at the political hotel in her New York regalia, adorned with spangles and beads and cords and tassels, the "ladies of the hotel" said that she was "fixed up like a Christmas tree"—a remark that we in the office coupled with Colonel Morrison's reflection when he spoke of Ab's "illustrated vests." At the meeting of the State Federation of Woman's Clubs, Mrs. Handy

first flourished her lorgnette, and came home with her wedding ring made over on a pattern after the prevailing style. About this time she made her famous remark to "Aunt" Martha Merrifield that she didn't think it proper for a woman to go through her husband's money with too sensitive a nose; she said that men must work and women must weep, and that she for one would not make the work of her husband any harder by criticising it with her silly morals.

As for Abner Handy, it would have made little difference to him then whether she or anyone else had tried to check his career; for he was cultivating a loud tone of voice and a regal sweep to his arms. He always signed himself on hotel registers Senator Handy, and the help about the Topeka hotels began to mark him for their hate, for he was insolent to those whom he regarded as his inferiors. But Colonel Morrison used to say that he wore his vest-buttons off crawling to those in authority. He took little notice of the town. He referred to us as "his people" in a fine feudal way, and went about town with his cigar pointing toward his hat brim and his eyes fixed on something in the next block. He be-



Went about town with his cigar pointing toward his hat-brim

came the attorney for a number of crooked promotion schemes, and the diamond rings on his wife's fingers crowded the second joint. He had telegraph and express franks, railway and Pullman passes in such quantities that it made his coat pocket bulge to carry them. Often he would spread out these evidences of his shame on his office table, to awe the local politicians, and in so far as they could influence the town opinion, they promulgated the idea that if Ab Handy was a scoundrel—and of course he was—he was a smart scoundrel. So he came to think this himself.

Mrs. Handy threw herself into the work of the City Federation with passionate zeal. Also she kept up her lodge connections, and explained to the women, whom she considered of a higher social caste than the lodge women, that she was "doing it to help Mr. Handy." She did a little church work for the same reason, but her soul was in the Federation, for it insured her social status as neither lodge nor church could do. So she put herself under the protecting seal-lined wing of Mrs. Julia Neal Worthington who on account of her efforts to clean

the streets we at the office had been taught by Colonel Morrison to know as the Joan of the trash-cans. And Miss Larrabee, our society reporter, told us that Mrs. Handy was the only woman in town who did not smile into her handkerchief when Mrs. Worthington, who had trained down to one hundred and ninety-seven pounds five and three-eighths ounces, gave her course of lectures on delsarte before the Federation.

It was Mrs. Handy who encouraged Mrs. Worthington to open her salon. But as there were lodge meetings the first three nights in the week, and prayer-meetings in the middle of the week, and as the choirs met for practice, and the whist clubs met for business the last of the week, the salon did not seem to take with the town, and so was discontinued. Then Mrs. Worthington and Mrs. Handy sought other fields. And the first field they stumbled into was the courthouse square. For fifty years the farmers near our town had been hitching at the racks provided by the county commissioners. But Mrs. Worthington decided that the time had come for a change and that the town was

getting large enough to take down the hitching-racks. So, as chairman of the Municipal Improvement section of the City Federation, Mrs. Worthington began war on the hitching-racks. At the Federation meetings for three months there were reports from committees appointed to interview the councilmen; reports of committees to interview the county commissioners—who were obdurate; reports of committees to lease new ground for the hitching rack stands; reports of the legal committee; reports of the sanitary committee, and through it all Mrs. Worthington rose at every meeting and declared that the hitching racks must be destroyed. And as she was rated in Bradstreet's report at nearly half a million dollars, her words had much force.

The town was beginning to stir itself. The merchants were with the women—because the women bought the dry goods and groceries—and we forgot about the farmers. To all this milling among the people Handy was oblivious, for he was stepping like a hen in high oats, with his eyes on a seat in Congress. Matters of mere local importance did not concern him. The rail-

roads were for him, and the stars in their courses seemed to him to be pointing his way to Washington. He knew of the hitching-rack trouble only when he had to go with Mrs. Handy to the dinners at the Worthington home given to the councilmen and their wives, who were lukewarm on the removal proposition.

In the spring before the election of 1902 Mrs. Worthington had a majority in the council, and one Saturday night the hitching-racks were taken down by the street commissioner. And within a week the town was on the verge of civil war, for the farmers of the county rose as one man and demanded the blood of the offenders. But Abner Handy knew nothing of the disturbance. The county attorney had the street commissioner and his men arrested for trespassing upon county property; farmers threatened to boycott the town. But Abner Handy's ear was attuned to higher things. Merchants who had signed the petition asking the council to remove the racks began to denounce the removal as an act of treason. But Abner Handy conferred with State leaders on great questions, and the city attorney, who was a candidate for county attor-

ney that fall, did not dare to defend the street commissioner. The council got stubborn, and Colonel Morrison, before whom as justice of the peace the case was to be tried, fearing for the professional safety of his three daughters in the town schools and his four daughters in the county schools, took a trip to his wife's people, and told us he was enlisted there for "ninety days or during the war"; and still Abner Handy looked at the green hills afar.

We are generally accounted by ourselves a fearless newspaper; but here we admitted that the situation required discretion. So we straddled it. We wrote cautious editorials in carefully-balanced sentences demanding that the people keep cool. We advised both sides to realise that only good sense and judgment would straighten out the tangle. We demanded that each side recognise the other's rights and made both sides angry, whereas General Durham, of the *Statesman,* made his first popular stroke in a dozen years by insisting, in double leads and italics, that the tariff on hides was a divine institution, and that humanity called upon us to hold the Philippines. Charley Hedrick knew

better than anyone else in town what a tempest was rising. He might have warned Handy, but he did not; for Handy had reached a point in his career where he considered that a mere county boss was beneath his confidence. More than that, Hedrick had refused to indorse Handy's note at the bank. Handy needed money, and being a shorn lamb, the wind changed in his direction in this wise:

In the midst of the furore that week, Mrs. Worthington gave an evening reception for the Federation and its husbands at her mansion, fed them sumptuously, and, after Mrs. Handy had tapped a bell for silence, Mrs. Worthington rose in her jet and passementerie and announced that our town had come to a crisis in its career; that we must now decide whether we were going to be a beautiful little city or a cow pasture. She said that beauty was as much an essential to life as money and that we would be better off with more beauty and less trade, and that with the courthouse square a mudhole the town could never rise to any real consequence. As the men of the town seemed to be moral cowards, she was going to enlist the women in this war, and

as the first step in her campaign she proposed to hire the Honourable Abner Handy to assist the city attorney in fighting this case, and as a retainer she would herewith and now hand him her personal check for five hundred dollars. Whereat the women clapped their hands, their husbands winked at one another, and "there was a sound of revelry by night." The check was put on a silver card-tray by Mrs. Worthington and set on a table in the midst of the company waiting for Handy to come forward and take it. After the town had looked at the check, Mrs. Handy seemed to cut his leashes and Abner went after it. He was waiting at the Worthington bank the next morning at nine o'clock to cash it—and all the town saw that also.

Whereupon the town grinned broadly that evening when it read in the *Statesman* a most audatory article about "our distinguished fellow-townsman." The article declared that it was "the duty of the hour to send Honourable Abner Handy to the halls of Congress." The *Statesman* contended that "Judge Handy had been for a lifetime the defender of those grand and glorious principles of freedom and protec-

tion and sound money for which the Grand Old Party stood." The General proclaimed that "it shall be not only a duty, but a pleasure, for our citizens to lay aside all petty personal and factional quarrels and rally round the standard of our noble leader in this great contest."

If Handy ever went to the city attorney's office to look after Mrs. Worthington's lawsuit, no one knew it. He smiled wisely when asked how the suit was progressing, and one day John Markley—who during the life of Ezra Worthington, hated him with a ten-horse-power hate and loaded it onto his widow's shoulders and the Worthington bank which she inherited—John Markley called Handy into the back room of the Markley Mortgage Company, and, when Handy passed the cashier's window going out, he cashed a check signed by John Markley for a thousand dollars on which was inscribed "for legal services in assisting the county attorney in the hitching rack case."

Handy had arrived at a point where he feared nothing. He seemed to believe that he lived a charmed life and never would get caught. He bought extra copies of the *Statesman,* which

was booming him for Congress, and sent them over the Congressional District by the thousands. He went to Topeka in his high silk hat and his New York clothes, gave out interviews on the causes of the flurry in the money market, and, desiring further advertisement, gave a banquet for the newspaper men of the capital which cost him a hundred dollars. So he became a great man. At home he assumed a patronising air to the people about Charley Hedrick. And one night in Smith's cigar store, just to be talking, he said that he didn't get so much of Mrs. Worthington's money as people thought, for part of it had to go to "square old Charley Hedrick." Hedrick was John Markley's attorney, and he had taken an active part in helping the county attorney prosecute the street commissioners. Naturally Handy's remark stirred up the town. It was two weeks, however, in getting to Hedrick, and when it came the man turned black and seemed to be swallowing a pint of emotional language before he spoke. And there Abner Handy's doom was sealed; though Hedrick did not make the sentence public.

Now, it is well known in our county that the

country people are slow to wrath. They were two months finding out beyond a question of doubt that Abner Handy had accepted Mrs. Worthington's money to act against them, but when they knew this there was no hope for Handy among them. They are a quiet people, and make no noise. For a month, only Charley Hedrick and the grocers and the hardware men, with whom the farmers trade, knew the truth about Handy's standing in the county. Hedrick bided his time. The Handy boom for Congress was rolling over the district, and the *Statesman* italics were becoming worn, and its exclamation points battered in the service, when one day Handy stalked up to Hedrick's office, imperiously beckoned Hedrick into the private room, and blurted out:

"Charley, I got to have some more money —need it in my business. Can't you touch old John Markley for me again—say for about five hundred on that hitching rack case? Sister Worthington is kind of wanting me to get action on her case."

Hedrick was dumb with rage, but Handy thought it was acquiescence. He went on:

"You just step down to the bank and say: 'John, I've noticed Ab Handy actin' kind of queer about that hitching rack case.' That's all you need say, and pretty soon I'll step in and say: 'John, I don't see how I can help doin' something for Aunt Julia Worthington.' And I believe I can tap him for five hundred more easy enough. I got an idea he is mightily in earnest about beating her in that suit."

When Hedrick got his breath, which was churning and wheezing in his throat, he cut Handy's sentence off with:

"You human razor-back shoat—you swill-barrel gladiator, why—why—I—I——" And Hedrick sparred for wind and went on before Handy realised the situation. "Ab Handy, I spat on the dust and breathed into the chaff that made you, and put you on the mud-sills of hell to dry, and I've got a right to turn you back into fertiliser, and I'm going to do it. Git out of here—git out of this office, or I——"

And the hulking form of Hedrick fell on the bag of shaking bones that was Handy and battered him through the latched door into the crowded outer office; and Handy picked him-

self up and ran like a wolf, turning at the door to show his teeth before he scampered through the hall and scurried down the stairs. As Hedrick came puffing out of the broken door his coat snagged on a splinter. He grinned as he unfastened himself:

"Well, the snail seems to be on the thorn; the lark certainly is on the wing.

"God's in his heaven.
All's right with the world!"

And he batted his eyes at the group of loafing local statesmen in his office as he viewed the wreckage, and went to the telephone and ordered a carpenter, without wasting any words on the crowd.

We decided long ago that the source of Hedrick's power in politics was what we called his "do it now" policy. All politicians have schemes. Hedrick puts his through before he talks about them. If he has an idea that satisfies his judgment, he makes it a reality in the quickest possible time. That is why the fellows around town who hate Hedrick call him the rattlesnake, and those who admire him call him

the Wrath of God. When he put up the telephone receiver he reached for his hat and bolted from the office under a full head of steam. He went directly to John Markley's back office, got the check that Markley had given to Handy, dictated a letter in the anteroom of Markley's office to a Kansas City plate-maker, inclosed fifty dollars as he passed the draft counter, and, as he swung by the post-office he mailed the Handy check with instructions to have ten photographic half-tone cuts made of the check and mailed back to Hedrick in four days.

Then he went to Mrs. Worthington, told her his story, as a lawyer puts his case before a jury —had her raging at Ab Handy—and got an order on the bank for the check she had given to Handy. This also he sent to the plate-maker, and in an hour was back at his desk dictating a half-page advertisement to go into every Republican weekly newspaper in the district. He sent that advertisement out with the half-tone cuts Monday morning, and it appeared all over the district that week. The advertisement was signed by Hedrick, and began:

"Browning has a poem made after visiting a dead house, and in it he describes the corpse of a suicide, and says 'one clear, nice, cool squirt of water o'er the bust,' is the 'right thing to extinguish lust.' And I desire this advertisement to be 'one clear, nice, cool squirt of water' over the political remains of Honourable Abner Handy, to extinguish if possible his fatal lust for crooked money." After this followed the story of Handy's perfidy in the hitching rack case, a petition in disbarment proceedings, and the copy of the warrant for his arrest charged with a felony in the case sworn to by Hedrick himself. But the effective thing was the pictures, showing both sides of the two checks, each carefully inscribed by the two makers "for legal services in the hitching rack case," and each check indorsed by Handy in his big, brazen signature.

Hedrick saw to it also that, on the day the country papers printed his advertisement, the Kansas City and Topeka papers printed the whole story, including the casting out of Handy from Hedrick's office. It did Handy little good to go to Topeka in his flashy clothes and

give out a festive interview asking his friends to suspend judgment, and saying that he would try his case in the courts and not in the newspapers. It was contended by the newspapers that if Handy had an honest defence, it would lose no weight in court by being printed in the newspapers; and his enemies in the Congressional fight pushed the charges against Handy so relentlessly that the public faith in him melted like an April snow, and when the delegates to the Congressional convention were named, our own county instructed its delegates against Handy. The farmers opposed him for taking the case against them, and the town scorned him for his perfidy. No one who was not paid for it would peddle his tickets at the primaries, so Handy, with his money all spent, went home on the night of the local primaries a whipped dog. They said around town that all the whipped dog got at home was a tin can; for it is certain that at daylight Handy was down on Main Street viciously drunk, flourishing a revolver with which he said he was going to kill Charley Hedrick and then himself. They took the pistol from him, and then

he wept and said he was going to jump in the river, but no one followed him when he started toward the bridge, and he fell asleep in the shade of the piers, where he was found during the morning, washed up and sent home sober.

One of the curious revelations of society's partnership in crime was the way the grocers and butchers who despised Ab Handy's method, but shared his gains when he succeeded, stopped giving him credit when he failed. At the end of the first year after the primary wherein he was defeated, the Handys could not get a dime's worth of beefsteak without the dime. And dimes were scarce. By that time Handy was wearing his flashy New York clothes for every day—frayed and spotted and rusty. His temperament changed with his clothes, from the oily optimism of success to the sodden pessimism of utter failure; which inspired Colonel Morrison, returning after the hitching rack case had been settled in favour of the town, to remark, speaking of Handy, that "an optimist is a man who isn't caught, and is cheering to keep up his courage, and a pessimist

is one who has been caught and thinks it will be but a question of time until his neighbours are found out too."

Mrs. Worthington, who was a necessary witness in the disbarment proceedings and the criminal proceedings against Handy, always went to Europe when the cases were called; so rather than put a woman in jail for contempt of court, the court dismissed the proceedings against Handy and he was not allowed to be even a martyr. One morning about a year and a half after Handy's defeat, when Hedrick opened his office door, he found Handy there with his fingers clutching the chair arms and his eyes fixed on the floor. The man was breathing audibly, and seemed to be struggling with a great passion. Hedrick and Handy had not spoken since they came through the panels of the door together, but Hedrick went to the miserable creature, touched him gently on the shoulder, and motioned him into the private office. There, with his eyes still on the floor, Handy told Hedrick that the end of the rope had been reached.

"I had to come down without any breakfast

this morning—because—they—they ain't anything in the house for her to fix. And there ain't any show for dinner. Next week, Red Martin has promised me some money he's goin' to get from Jim Huddleson; but they ain't a soul in town but you I can come to now"; and Handy raised his eyes from the floor in canine self-pity as he whined—"and she's making life a hell for me!" When Hedrick opened his desk and got out his check-book, he smiled as he fancied he could detect about Handy's body the faint resemblance of a wagging tail. He made the check for fifty dollars and gave it to Handy saying, "Oh, well, Ab—we'll let bygones be bygones."

Handy snapped at it and in an instant was gone.

That afternoon Hedrick met Handy sailing down Main Street in his old manner. His head was erect, his eyes were sparkling, his big, rough, statesman's voice was bellowing abroad, and his thumbs were in the armholes of his vest. He walked straight to Hedrick and led him by the coat lapel into a dark stairway. There was an air of deep mystery about Handy

and when he put his arm on Hedrick to whisper in his ear, Hedrick, smelling the statesman's breath heavy with whiskey and onions and cloves and cardamon seeds and pungent gum, heard this:

"Say, Charley, I'm fooling 'em—I've got 'em all fooled. They think I'm poor. They think I ain't got any money. But old Ab's too smart for them. I've got lots of money—all I want—all anyone could want—wealth beyond the dreams of avar—of av—avar—avar'ce, as John Ingalls used to say. Just look at this!" And with that Handy pulled from his inside coat pocket a roll of one and two-dollar bills, that seemed to Hedrick to represent fifty dollars less the price of about ten drinks. "Look a-here," continued Handy, "ol' Ab's got 'em all fooled. Don't you say anything about it; but ol' Ab's goin' to make his mark." And he shook Hedrick's hand and took him down to the street, and shook it again and again before prancing grandly down the sidewalk.

For three years Mrs. Handy's boarding-house has been one of the most exclusive in our town. They say that she pays Mr. Handy for mowing

the lawn and helping about the rough work in the kitchen, and that he sleeps in the barn and pays her for such meals as he eats. Sometimes a new boarder makes the mistake of paying the board money to Handy, and he appears on Main Street ostentatiously jingling his silver and toward evening has ideas about the railroad situation. On election days and when there is a primary Handy drives a carriage and gathers up his cronies in the fifth ward, who, like him, are not so much in evidence as they were ten years ago.

It was only last week that Hedrick was in our office telling us of Handy's "wealth beyond the dreams of avarice." He paused when he had finished the story, cocked his head on one side, and squinted at the ceiling as he said:

"For three long, weary, fruitless years I've searched the drug-stores of this town for the brand of liquor Ab had that day. I believe if I had two drinks of that I could write better poetry than old Browning himself."

Whereupon Hedrick shook himself out of the office in a gentle wheesy laugh.

XVII

The Tremolo Stop

OUR business has changed greatly since Horace Greeley's day. And, although machines have come into little offices like ours, the greatest changes have come in the men who do the work in these offices. In the old days—the days before the great war and after it—printers and editors were rarely leading citizens in the community. The editor and the printer were just coming out of the wandering minstrel stage of social development, and the journeyman who went from town to town seeking work, and increasing his skill, was an important factor in the craft. One might always depend upon a tramp printer's coming in when there was a rush of work in the office, and also figure on one of the tourists in the office leaving when he was needed most.

From the ranks of this wayward class came the old editors and reporters; they were post-graduates from the back room of newspaper

offices and they brought to the front room their easy view of life. Some of these itinerant writing craftsmen had professional fame. There was Peter B. Lee, who had tramped the country over, who knew Greeley and Dana and Prentice and Bob Burdett and Henry Watterson, and to whom the cub in country offices looked with worshipful eyes. There was "Old Slugs"—the printer who carried his moulds for making lead slugs, and who, under the influence of improper stimulants, could recite stirring scenes from the tragedies of Shakespeare. There was Buzby—old Buzby, who went about from office to office leaving his obituary set up by his own hand, conveying the impression that at last the end had come to a misspent life. Then there was J. N. Free—the "Immortal J. N.," as he called himself, a gaunt, cadaverous figure in broad hat and linen duster, with hair flowing over his shoulders, who stalked into the offices at unseemly hours to "raise the veil" of ignorance and error, and "relieve the pressure" of psychic congestion in a town by turning upon it the batteries of his mind.

They were a dear lot of old souls out of accord with the world about them, ever seeking the place where they would harmonise. They might have stepped out of Dickens's books or Cruikshank's pictures, and, when one recalls them now, their lineaments seem out of drawing and impossible in the modern world. And yet they did live and move in the world that was, and the other day when we were looking over the files we came across the work of Simon Mehronay,—the name which he said was spelled Dutch and sounded Irish,—and it does not seem fair to set down the stories of the others who have made our office traditions without giving some account of him.

For to us he was the most precious of all the old tribe of journalistic aborigines. He came to the office one bright April day with red mud on his shoes that was not the mud of our river bottoms, and we knew that he had ridden to town "blind baggage"—as they say of men who steal their way—from the South. The season was ripe for the birds to come North and it was the mud of Texas that clung to him. His greeting as he strode through the front room

not waiting for a reply was "How's work?" And when the foreman told him to hang up his coat, he found a stick, got a "chunk of copy," and was clicking away at his case three minutes from the time he darkened the threshold of the office.

There he sat for two weeks—the first man down in the morning and the last to quit at night—before anyone knew whence he came or whither he was bound. He had a little "false motion," the foreman said, and clattered his types too audibly in the steel stick, but as he got up a good string of type at the end of the day and furnished his own chewing tobacco, he created no unfavourable comment in the office. He was a bald little man, with a fringe of hair above the greasy velvet collar of his coat, with beady, dancing black eyes, and black chin whiskers and a moustache that often needed dyeing. It was the opinion of the foreman and the printers that Mehronay's weakness was liquor, though that opinion did not arise from anything that he said. For during the first two weeks we did not hear him say much, but in the years that followed, his mild little voice that

ever seemed to be teetering on the edge of the laugh into which he fell a score of times during an hour, became a familiar sound about the office, and the soft, flabby little hand which the other printers laughed about, during the first week of his employment with us, has rested on most of the shoulders in the shop guiding us through many sad ways.

In those days there were only three of us in the front room. All the bookkeeping and collecting and reporting and editorial writing were done by the three, and it happened that one morning near the first of the month, when the books needed attention, no one had heard the performance of "Hamlet" given by Thomas Keene at the opera house the night before, and no one about the paper could write it up. Wherefore there was perturbation; but in an hour this came from the back room set up in type and proved in the galley:

"There were more clean shaves in town last night than have been seen here for a long time. Everyone who wears cuffs and a necktie got a 'twice-over' and was 'out amongst 'em.' In the gallery of the opera house roosted the col-

lege faculty and the Potter boy who holds the Cottonwood Valley belt as the champion lay-down collar swell, and near him was Everett Fowler, who was making his first public appearance in his new parted spring whiskers, and was the observed of all observers. Colonel Alphabetical Morrison, with his famous U-shaped hair-cut, lent the grace of his presence to the dress circle. The first Methodist Church was represented by Brother-in-law John Markley, who is wearing a new flowered necktie, sent by his daughter in California (if you must know), and General Durham of the *Statesman* says that when the orchestra played 'Turkey in the Straw,' and Bill Master began to shake the sand-box—which is a new wrinkle in musical circles in our town—John Markley's feet began to wiggle until people thought this was his 'chill day.' After 'Turkey in the Straw,' the orchestra struck up something quick and devilish, which Charley Hedrick, who played the snare drum at Gettysburg, and is therefore entitled to speak on musical subjects, says was 'The Irish Washerwoman.' After this appropriate overture the curtain rose and the real show began.

"Mr. Keene's Hamlet is not so familiar to our people as his Richard III., but it gave great satisfaction; for it is certainly a Methodist Hamlet from the clang of the gong to the home-stretch. The town never has stood for Mr. Lawrence Barrett's Unitarian Hamlet, and the high church Episcopal Hamlet put on the boards last winter by Mr. Frederick Paulding was distinctly disappointing. One of the most searching scenes in the play was enacted when Ophelia got the power and had to be carried out to the pump. The Chicago brother who plays the ghost has a great voice for his work. He brought many souls to a realizing sense that they are sin-stricken and hair-hung over the fiery pit. The groans and amens from the sanctified in the audience were a delicate compliment to his histrionic ability. The queen seems to have been a Presbyterian, and the king a Second Day Adventist of an argumentative type. And they were not popular with the audience, but the boy preacher who did Laertes was exceedingly blessed with the gift of tongues. Brother Polonius seems to have been a sort of presiding elder, and, when his exhorta-

tion rose, the chickens in Mike Wessner's coop, in the meat-market downstairs, gave up hope of life and lay down to be cut up and fried for breakfast. The performance was a great treat and, barring the fact that some switchmen, thinking Ophelia was full, giggled during the mad scene, and the further fact that someone yelled, 'Go for his wind, Ham!' during the fencing scene, the evening with Shakespeare's weirdest hero was a distinct credit to Mr. Keene, his company and our people."

We wrote a conventional report of the performance, and printed Mehronay's account below it, under the caption FROM ANOTHER REPORTER, and it made the paper talked about for a week. Now in our town Keene was a histrionic god of the first order, and so many church people came to the office to "stop the paper" that circulation had a real impetus. We have never had a boom in subscription that did not begin with a lot of angry citizens coming in to stop the paper. It became known about town who wrote the Keene article, and Mehronay became in a small way a public character. We encouraged him to write more, so

every morning the first proof slips that came in began to have on them ten or a dozen short items of Mehronay's writing. There was a smile in every one of them, and if he wrote more than ten lines there was a laugh. It was Mehronay who referred to Huddleson's livery-stable joint—where the old soaks got their beer in a stall and salted it from the feed-box—as "a gilded palace of sin." It was Mehronay who wrote the advertisement of the Chinese laundryman and signed his name "Fat Sam Child of the Sun, Brother of the Moon and Second Cousin by marriage to all the Stars." It was Mehronay who took a galley of pi which the office devil had set up from a wrecked form, and interspersed up and down the column of meaningless letters "Great applause"—"Tremendous cheering"—Cries of "Good, good! —that's the way to hit 'em!"—"Hurrah for Hancock"—and ran it in the paper as a report of Carl Schurz's speech to the German-American League at the court-house. It was Mehronay who put the advertisement in the paper proclaiming the fact that General Durham of the *Statesman* office desired to purchase a good

second-hand fiddle, and explaining that the owner must play five tunes on it in front of the *Statesman* office door before bringing it in. Mehronay originated the fiction that there was an association in town formed to insure its members against wedding invitations which, in case of loss, paid the afflicted member a pickle dish or a napkin ring, to present as his offering to the bride.

Mehronay started a mythical Widowers' Protective Foot-racing Society, and the town had great sport with the old boys whose names he used so wittily that it transcended impudence. Mehronay got up a long list of husbands who wiped dishes when the family was "out of a girl," as our people say, and organised them into a union to strike for their altars and their kitchen fires. When we sent him out to write up a fire, however, he generally forgot the amount of insurance and the extent of the loss, but he told all about the way the crowd tried to boss the fire department; and if we sent him out to gather the local markets, he made such a mess of it that we were a week straightening matters up. Figures didn't mean anything to

Mehronay. When the bank failed, he tried to write something about it, but mixed the assets and the liabilities so hopelessly that we had to keep him busy with other things, so that he would have no time to touch the bank story. They used to say around town that when he laid down a piece of money, however large, on a store counter he never waited for his change, but be it said to the credit of most of the merchants that they would save it for Mehronay and give it to him on his next visit to the store, when he would be as joyful as a child.

Gradually he left the back room and became a fixture in the front office. He wrote locals and editorials and helped with the advertising, drawing for this the munificent salary of fifteen dollars a week, which should have kept him like a prince; but it did not—though what he did with his money no one knew. He bought no new clothes, and never buttoned those he had. Before sending him out on the street in the morning, someone in the office had to button him up, and if it was a gala day—say circus day, or the day of a big political powwow—we had to put a clean paper collar on

Mehronay above his brown wool shirt and shove out the dents in his derby hat—a procedure which he called "making a butterfly of fashion out of an honest workin' man." He slept in the press-room, on a bed which he rolled up and stowed behind the press by day, and in the evening he consorted with the goddess of nicotine—as he called his plug tobacco—and put in his time at his desk with a lead pencil and a pad of white paper writing copy for the next day's issue. Nothing delighted him so much as a fictitious personage or situation which held real relations with local events or home people. One of the best of his many inventions was a new reporter who, according to Mehronay's legend, had just quit work for a circus where he had been employed writing the posters. Mehronay's joy was to write up a local occurrence and pretend that the circus poster-writer had written it and that we had been greatly bothered to restrain his adjectives. A few days after the Sinclair-Handy wedding —a particularly gorgeous affair in one of the stone churches, which had been written up by the bride's mother, as the whole town knew, in

a most disgusting manner—Mehronay sat chuckling in his corner, writing something which he put on the copy-hook before going out on his beat. It was headed A DAZZLING AFFAIR and it ran thus:

"For some time we have realised that we have not been doing full justice to the weddings that occur in this town; we have been using a repressed and obsolete style which is painful to those who enter into the joyous spirit of such occasions, and last night's wedding in the family of the patrician Skinners we assigned to our gentlemanly and urbane Mr. J. Mortimer Montague, late of the publicity department of the world-famed Robinson Circus and Menagerie. The following graceful account from Mr. Montague's facile pen is the most accurate and satisfactory report of a nuptial event we have ever recorded in these columns."

And thereafter followed this:

"Last evening, just as the clock in the steeple struck nine, a vast concourse of the beauty and the chivalry of our splendid city, composing wealth beyond the dreams of the kings of India and forming a galaxy only excelled in splendour

by the knightly company at the Field of the Cloth of Gold, assembled to witness the marriage of Miss May Skinner and Mr. John Fortesque. The great auditorium was a bower of smilax and chrysanthemums, bewildering, amazing, superb in its verdant labyrinth. As the clock was striking the hour, the ten-thousand-dollar pipe-organ filled the edifice with strains of most seductive, entrancing music, played by Miss Jane Brown, the only real left-handed organist in the civilised world. Then came the wedding party, magnificent, radiant, resplendent with the glittering jewels of the Orient, dazzling with gorgeousness, stupefying and miraculous in its revelation of beauty. There were six handsome ushers—count them—six, ten bridesmaids—ten—a bevy of real, live, flower-bearing fairies, captured at an immense outlay of time and money in far Caucasia. The bride's resplendent costume and surpassing beauty put the blush upon the Queen of Sheba, made Hebe's effulgence fade as the moon before the sun; and as the long courtly train of knights errant and ladies-in-waiting passed the populace, they presented a regal spectacle,

never equalled since the proud Cleopatra sailed down the perfumed lotus-bearing Nile in her gilded pageant to meet Marc Antony, while all the world stood agape at the unheard-of triumph.

"To describe the bride's costume beggars the English language; and human imagination falls faint and feeble before the Herculean task. From the everlasting stars she stole the glittering diamonds that decked her alabaster brow and hid them in the Stygian umbrage of her hair. From the fleecy, graceful cloud she snared the marvellous drapery that floated like a dream about her queenly figure, and from the Peri at Heaven's gate she captured the matchless grace that bore her like an enchanted wraith through the hymeneal scene.

"The array of presents spread in the throne-room of the Skinner palace has been unexcelled in lavish expenditure of fabulous and reckless prodigal wealth anywhere in the world. Golden tokens literally strewed the apartment, merely as effulgent settings for the mammoth, appalling, maddening array of jewels and precious stones, sunbursts and pearls without price, that

gleamed like a transcendent electrical display in the hypnotising picture."

There was more of the same kind, but it need not be set down here. However, it should be said that nothing we ever printed in the paper before or since set the town to laughing as did that piece. We have calls to-day for papers containing the circus-poster wedding, and it was printed over two decades ago.

It was Mehronay's first great triumph in town; then the expected happened. For three days he did not appear at the office and we suspected the truth—that by day he slept the sleep of the unjust in the loft of Huddleson's stable and by night he vibrated between the Elite oyster parlour, where he absorbed fabulous quantities of soup, and Red Martin's gambling-room, where he disported himself most festively before the gang assembled there. The morning of the fourth day Mehronay appeared—but not at his desk. We found him sitting glumly on his stool at the case in the back room, clicking the types, with his hat over his eyes and the smile rubbed off his face.

We were a month coaxing Mehronay back

in to the front room. His self-respect grew slowly, but finally it returned, and he sat at his desk turning off reams of copy so good that the people read the paper up one side and down the other hunting for his items. He is the only man we have ever had around the paper who could write. Everyone else we have employed has been a news-gatherer. But Mehronay cared little for what we call news. He went about the town asking for news, and getting more or less of it, but the way he put it was much more important than the thing itself. He had imagination. He created his own world in the town, and put it in the paper so vividly that before we realised it the whole town was living in Mehronay's world, seeing the people and events about them through his merry countenance. No one ever referred to him as Mr. Mehronay, and before he had been on the street six months he was calling people by their first names, or by nicknames, which he tagged onto them. He was so fatherly to the young people that the girls in the Bee Hive, or the White Front, or the Racket Store used to brush his clothes when they needed it, if we in

the office neglected him, and smooth his back hair with their pocket combs, and he—never remembering the name of the particular ministering angel who fixed him up—called one and all of them "darter," smiled a grateful smile like an old dog that is petted, and then went his way. The girls in the White Front Drygoods Store gave him a cravat, and though it was made up, he brought it every morning in his pocket for them to pin on. He was as simple as a child, and, like a child, lived in a world of unrealities. He swore like a mule driver, and yet he told the men in the back room that he could never go to sleep without getting down and saying his prayers, and the only men with whom he ever quarrelled were a teacher of zoölogy at the College, who is an evolutionist, and Dan Gregg, the town infidel.

One morning when we were sitting in the office before going out to the street for the morning's grist, Mehronay dog-eared a fat piece of copy and jabbed it on the hook as he started for the door.

"My boy was drunk last night," he said. "Me and his mother felt so bad over it that I

gave him a pretty straight talk this morning. There it is."

The office dropped its jaw and bugged its eyes.

"Oh, yes," he continued. "Didn't you know I had a boy? He's been the best kind of a boy till here lately. I can see his mother don't like it and his sister's worried too." His face for a second wore an expression of infinite sadness, and he sighed even while the smile came back on the face he turned to us from the door as he said: "Sometimes I think he is studying law with old Charley Hedrick and sometimes I think he is n the bank with John Markley; but he is always with me, and was such a decent boy when I had him out to the College. But I saw him vith Joe Nevison last night, and I knew he'd been drinking."

With that he closed the door behind him nd was gone. This was the article that Mehonay left on the hook:

"Your pa was downtown this morning, complaining about his 'old trouble,' that crick in his ack that he got loading hay one hot day in Huron County, Ohio, 'before the army.' The

'old trouble,' as you will remember, bothers your pa a good deal, and your ma thinks that his father must have been a pretty hard-hearted man to let him work so hard when he was a boy. Your pa likes to have you and your ma think that when he was a boy he did nothing but work and go to prayer-meeting and go around doing noble deeds out of the third reader, but a number of the old boys of the Eleventh Kansas, who knew your pa in the sixties, are prepared to do a lot of forgetting for him whenever he asks it. The truth about your pa's 'old trouble' is that he was down at Fort Leavenworth just after the close of the war, and after filling up on laughing-water at a saloon, he got into a fight with the bartender, was kicked out of the saloon, and slept in the alley all night. That was his last whizz. He took an invoice of his stock and found that he had some of the most valuable experiences that a man can acquire, and he straightened up and came out here and grew up with the country. Your ma met him at a basket-meeting, and she thought he was an extremely pious young man, and they made a go of it.

"So, Bub, when you think that by breathing on your coat sleeve to kill the whisky you can fool your pa, you are wrong. Your pa in his day ate three carloads of cardamon seeds and cloves and used listerine by the barrel. He knew which was the creaky step on the stairs in his father's house and used to avoid it coming in at night, just as you do now, and he knows just what you are doing. More than that, your pa speaks from the bitterest kind of experience when he pleads with you to quit. It is no goody-goody talk of a mutton-headed old deacon that he is giving you; it has taken him a year to get his courage up to speak to you, and every word that he speaks is boiled out of an agony of bitter memories. He knows where boys that start as you are starting end if they don't turn back. Your pa turned, but he recollects the career of the Blue boys, who are divided between the penitentiary, the poorhouse and the southwest corner of hell; he recalls the Winklers—one dead, one a porter in a saloon in Peoria, one crazy; and he looks at you, and it seems to him that he must take you in his arms as he did when you were a little child in

the prairie fire, and run to safety with you. And when he talks to you with his bashful, halting speech, you just sit there and grin, and cut his heart to its core, for he knows you do not understand.

"It's rather up to you, Bub. In the next few months you will have to decide whether or not you are going to hell. Of course the 'vilest sinner may return' at any point along the road—but to what? To shattered health; to a mother heart-broken in her grave; to a wife damned to all eternity by your thoughtless brutality and to children who are always afraid to look up the alley, when they see a group of boys, for fear they may be teasing you—you, drunk and dirty, lying in the stable filth! To that you will 'return,' with your strength spent, and your sportive friends, gone to the devil before you, and your chance in life frittered away.

"Just sit down and figure it out, Bub. Of course there are a lot of good fellows on the road to hell; you will have a good time going; but you'll be a long time there. You'll dance and play cards and chase out nights, and soak your soul in the essence of don't-give-a-dam-

tiveness, and you'll wonder, as you go up in the balloon, what fun there is in walking through this sober old earth. Friends—what are they? The love of humanity—what is it? Thoughtfulness to those about you? Gentility—What are these things? Letteroll—letteroll! But as you drop out of the balloon, the earth will look like a serious piece of landscape.

"When you are old, the beer you have swilled will choke your throat; the women you have flirted with will hang round your feet and make you stumble. All the nights you have wasted at poker will dim your eyes. The garden of the days that are gone, wherein you should have planted kindness and consideration and thoughtfulness and manly courage to do right, will be grown up to weeds, that will blossom in your patches and in your rags and in your twisted, gnarly face that no one will love.

"Go it, Bub! don't stop for your pa's sake; you know it all. Your pa is merely an old fogy. Tell him you can paddle your own canoe. But when you were a little boy, a very little boy, with a soft, round body, your pa used to take you in his arms and rub his beard—his rough,

stubby, three-days' beard—against your face and pray that God would keep you from the path you are going in.

"And so the sins of the father, Bub—but we won't talk of that."

Three months later, when the Methodists opened their regular winter revival, Mehronay, becoming enraged at what he called the tin-horn clothes of the travelling evangelist conducting the meetings, began to make fun of him in the paper; and, as a revivalist in a church is a sacred person while the meetings are going on, we had to kill Mehronay's items about the revival; whereupon, his professional pride being hurt, Mehronay went forth into the streets, got haughtily drunk, and strutted up and down Main Street scattering sirs and misters and madams about so lavishly that men who did not appreciate his condition thought he had gone mad. That night he went to the revival, and sat upon the back seat alone, muttering his imprecations at the preacher until the singing began, when the heat of the room and the emotional music mellowed his pride, and he drowned out the revivalist's singing partner

with a clear, sweet tenor that made the congregation turn to look at him. Mehronay knew the gospel hymns by heart, as he seemed to know his New Testament, and the cunning revivalist kept the song service going for an hour. When Mehronay was thoroughly sober there was a short prayer, and the singer on the platform feelingly sang "There Were Ninety and Nine" with an adagio movement, and Mehronay's face was wet with tears and he rose for prayers.

He came to the office chastened and subdued next morning and wrote an account of the revival so eulogistic that we had to tone it down, and for a week he went about damning, with all the oaths in the pirate's log, Dan Gregg and the College professor who taught evolution. But no one could coax him back to the revival. As spring came we thought that he had forgotten the episode of his regeneration, and perhaps he had forgotten it, but the Saturday before Easter he put on the copy-hook an Easter sermon that made us in the office think that he had added another dream to his world. It was a curious thing for Mehronay to write; indeed,

few people in town realised that he did write it; for he had been rollicking over town on his beat every day for months after the revival, and half the pious people in town thought he shammed his emotion the night he came to the church merely to mock them and their revivalist. But we in the office knew that Mehronay's Easter sermon had come as the offering of a contrite heart. It is in so many scrapbooks in the town that it should be reprinted here that the town may know that Mehronay wrote it. It read:

"The celebration of Easter is the celebration of the renewal of life after the death that prevails in winter. People of many faiths observe a spring festival of rejoicing, and of prayer for future bounty. Probably the Easter celebration is like that at Christmas and Thanksgiving—a survival of some ancient pagan rite that men established out of overflowing hearts, rejoicing at the end of a good season and praying for favour at the beginning of a new one.

"To the Christian world Easter symbolises a Divine tragedy. The coming of Easter, as it is set forth in the Great Book, is a most

powerful story; it is the story of one of the deepest passions that may move the human heart—the passion of father-love.

"Once there lived in the desert a man and his little child—a very little boy, who sometimes was a bad little boy, and who did not do as he was told. On a day when the father was away about his business the child, playing, wandered out on the desert and was lost. From home the desert beckoned the little boy; it seemed fair and fine to adventure in. When the boy had been gone for many hours the father returned and could not find him, and knew that the child was lost. But the father knew the desert; he knew how it lured men on; he knew its parching thirst; he knew its thorns and brambles, and its choking dust and the heat that beats one down.

"And when he saw that the boy was lost his heart was aflame with anguish; he could all but feel the desert fire in the little boy's blood, the cactus barbs in the bleeding little feet, and the great lonesomeness of the desert in the little boy's heart; and as from afar the man heard a wailing little voice in his ears calling, 'Father,

father!' like a lost sheep. But it was only a seeming, and the house where the little boy had played was silent.

"Then the father went to the desert, and neither the desert fire murmuring at his brow, nor the sand that filled his mouth, nor the stones and prickles that cut his feet, nor the wild beasts that lurked upon the hillsides, could keep out of his ears the bleat of that little child's voice crying 'Father, father!' When the night fell, still and cold and numbing, the father pressed on, calling to the child in his agony; for he thought it was such a little boy, such a poor, lonesome, terror-stricken little boy out in the desert, lost and in pain, crying for help, with no one to hear.

"And wandering so, the father died, with his heart full of unspeakable woe. But they found the wayward child in the light of another day. And he never knew what his father suffered, nor why his father died, nor did he understand it all till he had grown to a man's stature, and then he knew; and he tried to live his days as his father had lived, and to lay down his life, if need be, for his friend.

"This is the Easter story that should come to every heart. The Christ that came into the desert of this weary life, and walked here foot-sore, heart-broken and athirst, came here for the love that was in His heart. Who put it there—whether the God that gave Shakespeare his brain and Wagner his harmonies, gave Christ His heart—or whether it was the God that paints the lily and moves the mountains in their labours—it matters not. It is one God, the Author and First Cause of all things. It is His heart that moves our own hearts to all their aspirations, to all the benevolence that the wicked world knows; it is His mind that is made manifest in our marvels of civilisation; it is His vast, unknowable plan that is moving the nations of the earth.

"Whether it be spirit or law or tendency or person—what matter?—it is our Father, who went to the desert to find His sheep."

All day Saturday, in order to square himself with the printers who set up his sermon, and to rehabilitate himself in the graces of the others about the office who knew of his weakness, Mehronay turned in the gayest lot of copy that

he had ever written. There was an " assessment call of the Widowers' Protective Association to pay the sad wedding loss of Brother P. R. Cullom, of the Bee Hive," whose wedding was announced in the society column; there was a card of thanks from Ben Pore to those who had come with their sympathy and glue to nurse his wooden Indian which had blown down and broken the night before, and resolutions of respect for the same departed brother, in most mocking language, from the Red Men's Lodge. There was an item saying seven different varieties of Joneses and three kinds of Hugheses were in town from Lebo—the Welsh settlement; there was a call for the uniformed rank of head waiters to meet in regalia at Mrs. Larrabee's reception, signed by the three men in town who were known to have evening clothes, and there was a meeting of the anti-kin society announced to discuss the length of time Alphabetical Morrison's new son-in-law should be allowed to visit the Morrisons before the neighbours could ask when he was going to leave. But when the paper was out Mehronay got a dozen copies from the press and sent them away in wrappers which

he addressed, and the piece his blue pencil marked was none of these.

For many days after Mehronay wrote his Easter sermon the gentle, low, beelike hum that he kept up while he was at work followed the tunes of gospel hymns, or hymns of an older fashion. We always knew when to expect what he called a "piece" from Mehronay—which meant an article into which he put more than ordinary endeavour—for his bee-song would grow louder, with now and then an intelligible word in it, and if it was to be an exceptional piece Mehronay would whistle. When he began writing the music would die down, but when he was well under sail on his "piece," the steam of his swelling emotions would set his chin to going like the lid of a kettle, and he would drone and jibber the words as he wrote them—half audibly, humming and sputtering in the pauses while he thought. Scores of times we have seen the dear old fellow sitting at his desk when a "piece" was in the pot, and have gathered the men around back of his chair to watch him simmer. When it was finished he would whirl about in his chair, as he gathered

up the sheets of paper and shook them together, and say: "I've writ a piece here—a damn good piece!" And then, as he put the copy on the hook and got his hat, he would tell us in most profane language what it was all about—quoting the best sentences and chuckling to himself as he went out onto the street.

As the spring filled out and became summer we noticed that Mehronay was singing fewer gospel hymns and rather more sentimental songs than usual. And then the horrible report came to the office that Mehronay had been seen by one of the printers walking by night after bed-time under the State Street elms with a woman. Also his items began to indicate a closer knowledge of what was going on in society than Mehronay naturally could have. In the fall we learned through the girls in the Bee Hive that he had bought a white shirt and a pair of celluloid cuffs. This rumour set the office afire with curiosity, but no one dared to tease Mehronay. For no one knew who she was.

Not until late in the fall, when Madame Janauschek came to the opera house to play "Macbeth," did Mehronay uncover his intrigue.

Then for the first time in his three years' employment on the paper he asked for two show tickets! The entire office lined up at the opera house—most of us paying our own way, not to see the Macbeths, but to see Mehronay's Romeo and Juliet. The office devil, who was late mailing the papers that night, says that about seven o'clock Mehronay came in singing "Jean, Jean, my Bonnie Jean," and that he went to his trunk, took out his celluloid cuffs, a new sky-blue and shell-pink necktie that none of us had seen before, a clean paper collar—and the boy, who probably was mistaken, swears Mehronay also took his white shirt—in a bundle which he proudly tucked under his arm and toddled out of the office whistling a wedding march. An hour later, dressed in this regalia and a new black suit, buttoned primly and exactly in a fashion unknown to Mehronay, he appeared at the opera house with Miss Columbia Merley, spinster, teacher of Greek and Hellenic philosophy at the College. The office force asked in a gasp of wonder: "Who dressed him?" Miss Merley—late in her forties, steel-eyed, thin-chested, flint-faced and with hair

knotted so tightly back from her high stony brow that she had to take out two hairpins to wink—Miss Merley might have done it—but she had no kith or kin who could have done it for her, and certainly the hand that smoothed the coat buttoned the vest, and the hand that buttoned the vest put on the collar and tie, and as for the shirt——

But that was an office mystery. We never have solved it, and no one had the courage to tease Mehronay about it the next morning. After that we knew, and Mehronay knew that we knew, that he and Miss Merley went to church every Sunday evening—the Presbyterian church, mind you, where there is no foolishness—and that after church Mehronay always spent exactly half an hour in the parlour of the house where his divinity roomed. A whole year went by wherein Mehronay was sober, and did not look upon the wine when it was red or brown or yellow or any other colour. Now when he "writ a piece" there was frequently something in it defending women's rights. Also he severed diplomatic relations with the girl clerks in the White Front and the Bee

Hive and the Racket, and bought a cane and aspired to some dignity of person. But Mehronay's heart was unchanged. The snows of boreal affection did not wither or fade his eternal spring. The sap still ran sweet in his veins and the bees still sang among the blossoms that sprang up along his path. He was everyone's friend, and spoke cheerily to the dogs and the horses, and was no more courteous to the preachers and the bankers, who are our most worshipful ones in town, than to the men from Red Martin's gambling-room, and even the woman in red, whom all the town knows but whom no one ever mentions, got a kind word from Mehronay as they met upon the street. He always called her sister.

And so another year went by and Mehronay's "pieces" made the circulation grow, and we were prosperous. It became known about town long before we knew it in the office that if Mehronay kept sober for three years she would have him, and when we finally heard it he was on the last half of the third year and was growing sombre. "In the Cottage by the Sea" was his favourite song, and "Put Away

the Little Playthings" also was much in his throat when he wrote. We thought, perhaps—and now we know—that he was thinking of a home that was gone. The day before Mehronay's wedding a child died over near the railroad, and on the morning he was to be married we found this on the copy hook when we came down to open the office, after Mehronay had gone to claim his bride:

"A ten-line item appeared in last night's paper, away down in one corner, that brought more hearts together in a common bond—the bond of fear and sympathy and sorrow—than any other item has done for a long time. The item told of the death, by scarlet fever, of little Flossie Yengst. Probably the child was not known outside of her little group of playmates; her father and mother are not of that advertised clique known of men as prominent people; he is an engineer on the Santa Fé, and the mother moves in that small circle of friends and neighbours which circumscribes American motherhood of the best type. And yet last night, when that little ten-line item was read by a thousand firesides in this town, thousands and

thousands of hearts turned to that desolate home by the track, and poured upon it the benediction of their sympathies. That home was the meeting-place where rich and poor, great and weak, good and bad, stood equals. For there is something in the death of a little child, something in its infinite pathos, that makes all human creatures mourn. Because in every heart that is not a dead heart, calloused to all joy or sorrow, some little child is enshrined—either dead or living—and so child-love is the one universal emotion of the soul, and child-death is the saddest thing in all the world.

"A child's soul is such a small thing, and the world and the systems of worlds, and the infinite stretches of illimitable space, are so wide for a child's soul to wander in, that, sane as we may be, stolid as we may try to be, we think in imagery, and the figure of little feet setting off on the far track to the end of things, hunting God, wrings our heart-strings and makes our throats grip and our eyelids quiver.

"And then a child dying, leaving this good world of ours, seems to have had so small a chance for itself. There is something in all of

us struggling against oblivion, striving vainly to make some real impress on the current of time, and a child, dying, can only clutch the hands about it and go down—forever. It seems so merciless, so unfair. Perhaps that is why, all over the world, the little graves are cared for best. It is to the little graves that we turn in our keenest anguish and not to the larger mounds; to the little graves that our hearts are drawn in our hours of triumph. And so the child, though dead, lives its appointed time and dies only in the fullness of its years. The little shoes, the little dresses, the 'little tin soldiers covered with rust,' and the memories sweeter than dreams of a honeymoon, these are life's immortelles that never fade. And though men and women come and go upon the earth, though civilisations may wither and pass, these little images remain; and the sun and the stars, which see men come and go, may see these little idols before which every creature bows, and the sun and stars, knowing no time, may think these children's relics are also eternal.

"It is a desperately lonely home, that Yengst home, with the little girl gone away on a long

journey; but how tight and close other fathers and mothers hugged their little ones last night when their hearts came back from the house of sorrow. And the little ones, feeling no fear, unconscious of the pang of terror that was shooting through the souls about them—the children played on, and maybe, before dropping to sleep, wondered a little at anxious looks they saw in grown-up eyes.

"This is the faith of a little child, curious but implicit, in the goodness of those things outside one's self. And 'of such is the Kingdom of Heaven.'"

A day or so after the wedding someone said to him: "Mehronay, sometimes your pieces make me cry," and he replied with all the fine sincerity of his heart showing in his eyes: "Yes —and if you only knew how they make me cry! Sometimes when I have written one like—like that—I go to my bed and sob like a child." He turned and walked away, but he came into the office whistling "The Dutch Company."

After his wedding we made brave, in a sly way, to rail at Mehronay about his love affair, and he took it good-naturedly. He knew the

situation just as it was; his sense of humour allowed him no false view of the matter. One afternoon when the paper was out, George Kirwin, the foreman, and one of the reporters and Mehronay were in the back room leaning against the imposing-stones looking over the paper, when Kirwin said: "Say, Mehronay, how did you get yourself screwed up to ask her?"

It was spoken in a joke. The two young men were grinning, but Mehronay looked at the floor in a study as he said:

"Well, to be honest—damfino if I ever did—just exactly." He smiled reflectively in a pause and continued: "Nearest I remember was one night we was sitting with our feet on the base-burner and I looked up and says, 'Hell's afire, Commie'—I called her that for short—'why in the devil don't a fine woman like you get married? She got up and come over to where I was a-sitting and before I could say Lordamighty, she put her hand on my shoulder and says real soft and solemn: 'I'll just be damned if I don't believe I will.'"

He did not smile when he looked up, but

sighed contentedly as he added reverently: "And so, by hell, she did!" If Columbia Merley Mehronay had known this language which her husband's innocent inadvertence put into her mouth she would have strangled him—even then.

We did not have Mehronay with us more than a year after his wedding. Mrs. Mehronay knew what he was worth. She asked for twenty-five dollars a week for him, and when we told her the office could not afford it she took him away. They went to New York City, where she peddled his pieces about town until she got him a regular place. There they have lived happily ever after. Mehronay brings his envelope home every Saturday night, and she gives him his carfare and his shaving-money and puts the rest where it will do the most good. When the men from our office go to New York —which they sometimes do—they visit with Mehronay at his office, and sometimes—if there is time for due and proper notice of the function in writing—there is an invitation to dinner. Mehronay fondles his old friends as a child fondles its playmates and he takes eager pleasure

in them, but she that was Columbia Merley all but searches their pockets for the tempter.

Mehronay has never broken his word. He knows if he does break it she will tear him limb from limb and eat him raw. So he goes to his work; writes his pieces, hums his gentle bee-song—so that men do not like to room with him at the office—and has learned to keep himself fairly well buttoned up in the great city. But Miss Larrabee that was—who used to edit the society page for our paper, but who now lives in New York—told us when she was home that as she was walking down Fourth Avenue one winter day when the street was empty, she saw Mehronay standing before the window of a liquor store looking intently at the display of bottled goods before him. When he saw her half a block away he turned from her and shuffled rapidly down the street, clicking his cane nervously.

It was not for him!

XVIII

Sown in Our Weakness

WHEN one comes to know an animal well—say a horse or a cow or a dog—and sees how sensibly it acts, following the rules of conduct laid down by the wisdom of its kind, one cannot help wondering how much happier, and healthier, and better, human beings would be if they used the discretion of the animals. For ages men have been taught what is good for their bodies and their minds and their souls. There has been no question about the wisdom of being temperate and industrious and honest and kind; and the folly of immoderation and laziness and chicanery and meanness is so well known that a geometrical proposition has not been more definitely proved. Yet only a few people in any community observe the rules of life, and of these few no one observes them all; and so misery and pain and poverty and anguish are as

a pestilence among men, and they wonder why they are living in such a cruel world. It was Eli Martin who, back in the seventies, won the prize in the Bethel neighbourhood for reciting more chapters of the Old Testament than any other child in Sunday-school; and the old McGuffey's Reader that he used on week-days was filled with moral tales; but someway when it came to applying the rules he had learned, and the moral that the stories pointed, Eli Martin lacked the sense of a dog or a horse. Once, when the paper contained an account of one of Red Martin's police court escapades, George Kirwin recalled that, when we offered a prize during the Christmas season of 1880, for the best essay by a child under twelve, it was Ethelwylde Swaney who won the prize with an essay on the Weakness of Vanity; and she married Eli Martin when she and the whole town knew what he was.

Naturally one would suppose that two persons so full of theoretical wisdom would have applied it, and that in applying it they would have been the happiest and most useful people in all the town; but instead they were probably

the most miserable people in town, and Mrs. Martin, whom we knew better than Red, because she once had worked in the office, was forever bemoaning what she called her "lot," though we knew for many years that her "lot" was not the result of the fates against her, but merely the inevitable consequence of her temperament.

Before we put in linotypes and set our type by machinery it was set by girls. Usually we employed half-a-dozen, who came from the town high school. They kept coming and going, as girls do who work in country towns, getting married in their twenties or finding something better than printing, and it is likely that in ten years as many as fifty girls have worked in the office, and be it said to the credit of the girls—which cannot be said of so many of the boys and men who have worked in the shop—that they were girls we were proud of—all but Ethelwylde Swaney.

She that we called the Princess worked in the office less than two years, but the memory of her still lingers, though hardly could one say like "the scent of the roses"; for the Princess

was not merely a poor compositor, she was the kind that would make mistakes and blame others for them, and that kind never learns. Though she ran away to marry Red Martin—which was her own mistake—this habit of blaming others for her faults was so strong that she never forgave her mother for making the match. We know in our office that Mrs. Swaney did not dream that the girl was even going with Red Martin until they were married. Yet the Martin neighbours for twenty years have blamed Mrs. Swaney. When the Princess was in the office we found out that the truth wasn't in her; also we discovered that she was lazy and that she cried too easily. Right at the busy hour in the afternoon we used to catch her with a type in her fingers and her hand poised in the air, looking off into space for a minute at a time, and when we spoke to her she would put her head on her case and cry softly; and the foreman would have to apologise before she would go back to work. Even then she would have to take the broken piece of looking-glass that she kept in her capital "K" box and make an elaborate toilet before settling

down. Moreover, though she was only seventeen, much of the foreman's time was spent chasing dirty-faced little boys away from her case, and if some boy didn't have his elbow in her quad box, she was off her stool visiting either with some other girl, or standing by the stove drying her hands—she was eternally drying her hands—and talking to one of the men. In all the year and a half that she was in the office the Princess never learned how to help herself. When she had to dump her type, she had to call some man from his work to help her—and then there would be more conversation.

But we kept her and were patient with her on account of her father, John Swaney, a hard-working man who was trying to make something of the Princess, so we put up with her perfumery and her powder rags and her royal airs, and did all we could to teach her the difference between a comma and a period—though she never really learned; and we were still patient with her, even when she deliberately pied a lot of type after being corrected for some piece of carelessness or worse. We made due allowances for the Rutherford temper,

which her father warned us not to arouse. Nevertheless, her mother came to the office one winter day in her black straw hat with a veil around it, and with the coat she had worn for ten years, to tell us that she was afraid working in the shop would hurt her daughter's social standing. So the Princess walked out that night in a gust of musk—in her picture hat and sweeping cloak, with bangles tinkling and petticoat swishing—and the office knew her no more forever.

About the time that the Princess left the office to improve her social standing, Eli Martin and his big mule team came to town from the Bethel neighbourhood. He was as likely a looking red-headed country boy as you ever saw. We were laying the town waterworks pipes that year, and Eli and his team had work all summer. On the street he towered above the other men several inches in height, and he looked big and muscular and masculine in his striped undershirt and blue overalls, as he worked with his team in the hot sun. Of course, the Princess would not have seen him in those days. Her nose was seeking a higher social level, and the clerks in the White Front drygoods store formed

the pinnacle of her social ideal. But Eli Martin was naturally what in our parlance we call a ladies' man, and he was not long in learning that the wide-brimmed black hat, the ready-made faded green suit and the red string necktie which had swept the girls down before him in the Bethel neighbourhood would accomplish little in town. So when winter came, and work with his team was hard to get, he sold his mules and bedecked himself in fine linen. He had a few hundred dollars saved up, so he lived in the cabbage smells of the Astor House, and fancied that he was enjoying the refinements of a great city. Time hung heavily upon him, and at night he joined the switchmen and certain young men of leisure in the town in a more or less friendly game of poker in the rooms at the head of the dark stairway on South Main Street.

When spring came the young man had no desire and little need to go back to work, for by that time he was known as Lucky Red. In a year the sunburn left him and he grew white and thin. He went to Kansas City for a season, and became known among gamblers as far west

as Denver; but he was only a tin-horn gambler in the big cities, while in our town he was at the head of his profession, so he came back and opened a room of his own. He came back in a blaze of glory; to wit: a long grey frock coat with trousers to match, pleated white shirt studded with blinding diamonds, a small white hat dented jauntily on three sides, a matted lump of red hair on the back of his head and a dashing red curl combed extravagantly low on his forehead. Before he left town for his foreign tour Red Martin used to hang about the churches Sunday evenings, peering through the blinds and making eyes at the girls; but upon his return he had risen to another social level. He had acquired a cart with red wheels and a three-minute horse; so he dropped from his social list the girls who "worked out" and made eyes at those young women who lived at home, gadding around town evenings, picking up boys on the street and forever talking about their "latest."

It was the most natural thing in the world that Red and the Princess should find each other, and six months before the elopement we

heard that the Princess was riding about the country with him in the red-wheeled cart. For after she left the office in one way and another we had kept track of the girl—sometimes through her father, who, being a carpenter, was frequently called to the office to fix up a door or a window; sometimes through the other girls in the office, and sometimes through Alphabetical Morrison, whose big family of girl schoolteachers made him a storage battery of social information.

It seems that the Rutherford temper developed in the Princess as she grew older. Mrs. Swaney was Juanita Sinclair; her father was a mild-mannered little man, who went out of doors to cough, but her mother was a Rutherford—a big, stiff-necked, beer-bottle-shaped woman, who bossed the missionary society until she divided the church. John Swaney, who is not a talkative man, once got in a crowd at Smith's cigar-store where they were telling ghost stories, and his contribution to the horror of the occasion was a relating of how, when they were fooling with tables, trying to make them tip at his house one night at a family re-

union, the spirit of Grandma Rutherford appeared, split the table into kindling, dislocated three shoulder-blades and sprained five wrists. It was this Rutherford temper that the Princess wore when she slouched around the house in her mother-hubbard with her hair in papers. The girls in the office used to say that if her mother over-cooked the Princess's egg in the morning she would rise grandly from the breakfast table, tipping over her chair behind her, and rush to her room " to have a good cry," and the whole family had to let the breakfast cool while they coaxed her down. That was the Rutherford temper. Also, when they tried to teach her to cook, it was the Rutherford temper that broke the dishes. Colonel Morrison once told us that when the Princess thought it was time to give a party, the neighbours could see the Rutherford temper begin wig-wagging at the world through the Princess's proud head, and there was nothing for her father to do but to kill the chickens, run errands all day to the grocery store, and sit in the cellar freezing cream, and then go to the barn at night to smoke. It was known in the neighbourhood that the Princess



The traveling men on the veranda craned their necks to watch her out of sight

dragged her shoestrings until noon, and that her bed was never in the memory of woman made up in the daytime. We are Yankees in our town, and these things made more talk to the girl's discredit than the story that she was keeping company with Red Martin!

But we at the office saw in the proud creature that passed our window so grandly nothing to indicate her real self. The year that Red Martin came back to town the Princess used to turn into Main Street in an afternoon, wearing the big black hat that cost her father a week's hard work, looking as sweet as a jug of sorghum and as smiling as a basket of chips. Though women sniffed at her, the men on the veranda of the Hotel Metropole craned their necks to watch her out of sight. She jingled with chains and watches and lockets and chatelaines, carried more rings than a cane rack, and walked with the air of the heroine of the society drama at the opera house. When she was on parade she never even glanced toward our office, where she had jeopardised her social position. She barely quivered a recognising eyebrow at the girls who had worked with her,

and they had their laugh at her, so matters were about even. But the office girls say that, after the Princess eloped with Red Martin, she was glad to rush up and shake hands with them. For we know in our town that the princess business does not last more than ten days or two weeks after marriage; it is a trade of quick sales, short seasons and small profits. The day that the elopement was the talk of the town Colonel Alphabetical Morrison was in the office. He said that he remembered Juanita Sinclair when she was a princess and wore Dolly Varden clothes and was the playfullest kitten in the basketful that used to turn out to the platform dances on Fourth of July, and appear as belles of the suppers given for the Silver Cornet Band just after the war. "But," added the Colonel, "this town is full of saffron-coloured old girls with wiry hair and sun-bleached eyes, who at one time or another were in the princess business. Not only has every dog his day, but eventually every kitten becomes a cat."

From the night of the charivari when Red Martin handed the boys twenty dollars—the

largest sum ever contributed to a similar purpose in the town's history—he and the Princess began to slump. The sloughing off of the veneer of civilisation was not rapid, but it was sure. The first pair of shoes that Red bought after his wedding were not patent leather, and, though the porter of his gambling place blacked them every morning, still they were common leather, and the boy noticed it. Likewise, the Princess had her hat retrimmed with her old plumes the fall after her wedding, bought no new clothes, and wore her giddy spring jacket, thin as it was, all winter, and after the second baby came no human being ever saw her in anything but a wrapper, except when she was on Main Street.

The neighbours said she wore a wrapper so that she could have free use of her lungs, for when Red and the Princess opened a family debate, the neighbours had to shut the doors and windows and call in the children. Notwithstanding all the names that she called him in their lung-testing events, there was no question about her love for the man. For, after the first year of her marriage, though she lost interest in

her clothes and ceased calling for the "fashion leaf" at the dress-goods counter in the White Front, and let her hair go stringy, we around our office knew that the Princess was only a child, who some way had lost interest in her old toys. When God gives babies to children, the children forget their other dolls, and the Princess, when the babies came, put away her other dolls, and played with the toys that came alive. And she spanked them and fondled them and scolded them with the same empty-headed vanity that she used to devote to her clothes.

Red Martin was one of the Princess's dearest dolls, and she and the babies were his toys; but, being a boy, he did not care for them so much with the paint rubbed off, yet he did not neglect them. Instead, he neglected himself. When the babies began to put grease spots on his clothes, he did not clean them, and about the time his wife quit powdering, when she came to Main Street, he stopped wearing collars. She grew fat and frowsy, and her chief interest in life seemed to be to over-dress her children, and sometimes Red Martin encouraged her by bringing home the most extravagant suits for

the boys, and sometimes he abused her when the bills came in for things which she had bought for the children, and asked why she did not buy something half-way respectable-looking to wear herself. After each of their furious quarrels she would go over the neighbourhood the next day and tell the neighbours that her mother had married her to a gambler, and ask them what a gambler's wife could expect. If any neighbour woman agreed with Mrs. Martin about her husband or her position Mrs. Martin would become angry and flounce out of the house, but if the women spoke kindly of her husband she would berate him and weep, and assure them that she had refused the banker, or the proprietor of the Bee Hive, or anyone else who seemed to make her story possible.

By the time that the third baby was old enough to carry his baby sister and the fifth baby was in the crib, Red Martin's face had begun to grow purple. He lost the gambling-room which was once his pride; it was operated by a youth with a curly black moustache, whose clothes recalled the days of Red's triumph. Red was only a dealer, and his trousers were frayed at the bot-

tom and he shaved but once a week. Then the Princess used to come slinking up Main Street at night carrying a pistol under her coat to use if she found the woman with him. Who the woman was the neighbours never knew, but the Princess gave them to understand that they would be surprised if she told them. It was her vanity to pretend that the woman was a society leader, as she called her, but the boys around the poker-dive knew that Red Martin's days as a heart-breaker were gone. For what whisky and cocaine and absinthe could do for Red to hurry his end they were doing, but a man is a strong beast, and it takes many years to kill him. Also, the Lord saves men like Red for horrible examples, letting them live long that He may not have to waste others; but women seem to have God's pity and He takes them out of their misery more quickly than He takes men. With the coming of the seventh baby the Princess died. When the news came to the office that she was gone we were not sorry, for life had held little for her. Her looks were gone; her health was gone; her dreams were smudged out—pitiful and wretched and sordid as they were, even at

the best. Yet for all that George Kirwin took down to the funeral a wreath which the office force bought for her.

To know George Kirwin casually one would say he never saw anything but the types and machinery in the back room of our office. When he went among strangers he seemed to be looking always at his hands or studying his knees, and his responses to those whom he did not know were "yea, yea," and "nay, nay"; but that night he told us more about the funeral of the Princess than all the reporters on the paper would have learned. He told us how the pitiful little parlour with its advertising chromos and its soap-prize lamp was filled with the women who always come to funerals in our town—funerals being their only diversion; how they sat in the undertaker's chairs with their handkerchiefs carefully folded and in their hands during the first part of the service, waiting for Brother Hopper to tell about his mother's death, which he never fails to do at funerals, though the elders have spoken to him about it, as all the town knows; how Red Martin, shaved for the occasion, and, in a borrowed

suit of clothes, stood out by the well and did not come into the house during the services; how only the elder children sat in the front room with the other mourners, and how the prattle of the little ones in the kitchen ran through the parson's prayer with heart-breaking insistence.

George seemed to think that the poverty-stricken little makeshifts to bring beauty into the miserable home and keep up the appearance of a kind of gentility—perhaps for the children—was the best thing he ever knew about the Princess, and he said that he was glad that he went to the funeral for the geraniums in the crêpe paper covered tomato cans, the cheap lace curtains at the windows, and the hair-wreath inheritance from the Swaneys, made him think that the best of the Princess might have survived all the rack and calamity of the years.

When the funeral left the house the neighbour women came and put it in order, and there was a better supper waiting for the father and the children than they had eaten for many years. And then, after the dishes were put away, the neighbours left; and for what he tried to do and be for the motherless brood just that one night,

God will put down a good mark for Eli Martin —even though the man failed most sadly.

When he went back to the gambling-room the next night, where he was porter; men tried not to swear while he was in earshot, and the next day they swore only mild oaths around him, out of respect for his grief, but the day after they forgot their compunctions, and, within a week, Red Martin seemed to have forgotten, too. In time, the family was scattered over the earth—divided among kin, and adopted out, and as the town grew older its conscience quickened and the gambling-room was closed, whereupon Red Martin went to Huddleston's livery stable, where he worked for enough to keep him in whisky and laudanum, and ate only when someone gave him food.

He grew dirty, unkempt, and dull-witted. Disease bent and twisted him hideously. When he was too sick to work, he went to the poor-house, and came back weak and pale to sit much in the sun on the south side of the building like a sick dog. When he is lying about the street drunk, little boys poke sticks at him and flee with terror before him when he wakes to

blind rage and stumbles after them. It is hard to realise that this disgusting, inhuman-looking creature is the Red Martin of twenty years ago, who, in his long grey frock coat, patent leather shoes, white hat and black tie, walked serenely up the steps of the bank the day it failed, tapped on the door-pane with his revolver barrel, and, when a man came to answer, made him open, and backed out with his revolver in one hand and his diamonds and money in the other. He does not recall in any vague way the Red Martin who gave the town a month's smile when he said, after losing all his money on election, that he had learned never to bet on anything that could talk, or had less than four legs. That Red Martin has been dead these many years; perhaps he was no more worthy than this one who hangs on to life, and bears the name and the disgrace that his dead youth made inevitable.

How strange it is that a man should wreck himself, and blight those of his own blood as this man has done! He knew what we all know about life and its rules. He had been told, as we all are told in a thousand ways, that bad

conduct brings sorrow to the world, and that pain and wretchedness are the only rewards of that behaviour which men call sin. And yet there he is, sitting on his hunkers near the stable, with God's stamp of failure all over his broken, battered body—put there by Red Martin's own hands. But George Kirwin, who often thinks with a kindlier spirit than others, says we are Red Martin's partners in iniquity, for we all lived here with him, maintaining a town that tolerated gambling and debauchery, and that, in some way, we shall each of us suffer as Red has suffered, insomuch as each has had his share in a neighbour's shame.

We tell George that he is getting old, though he is still on the bright side of forty, because he likes to come down town of evenings and hold a parliament with Henry Larmy and Dan Gregg and Colonel Morrison. Sometimes they hold it in the office and settle important affairs. A month ago they settled the immortality of the soul, and the other night, returning to their former subject, the question came up: "What will become of Red Martin when he goes to Heaven?" Dan contended that the poor fellow

is carrying around his own little blowpipe hell as he goes through life. George Kirwin maintained that Red Martin will enter the next world with the soul that died when his body began to live in wickedness; that there must have been some imperishable good in him as a boy, and that Heaven, or whatever we decide to call the next world, must be full of men and women like Red Martin—some more respectable than he—whose hell will be the unmasking of their real selves in the world where we "shall know as we are known." While we were sitting in judgment on poor Red Martin, in toddled Simon Mehronay, who is visiting in town from New York in the company of the vestal virgin who had, as he expressed it, snatched him as a brand from the burning. Mehronay has been gone from town nearly twenty years, and until they told him he did not know how Red Martin had fallen. When he heard it, Mehronay sighed and tears came into his dear old eyes, as he put his hand on Colonel Morrison's arm and said:

"Poor Red! Poor Red! A decent, brave, big-hearted chap! Why, he's taken whisky

away from me a dozen times! He's won my money from me to keep it over Saturday night. Why, I'm no better than he is! Only they've caught Red, and they haven't caught me. And when we stand before the judgment-seat, I can tell a damnsight more good things about Red than he can about me. I'm going out to find him and get him a square meal."

And so, while we were debating, Mehronay went down the Jericho road looking for the man who was lying there, beaten and bruised and waiting for the Samaritan.

XIX

"Thirty"

IN the afternoon, between two and three o'clock, the messenger boy from the telegraph office brings over the final sheet of the day's report of the Associated Press. Always at the end is the signature "Thirty." That tells us that the report is closed for the day. Just why "Thirty" should be used to indicate the close of the day's work no one seems to know. It is the custom. They do so in telegraph offices all over the country, and in the newspaper business "Thirty" stands so significantly for the end that whenever a printer or a reporter dies his associates generally feel called upon to have a floral emblem made with that figure in the centre. It is therefore entirely proper that these sketches of life in a country town, seen through a reporter's eyes, should close with that symbolic word. But how to close? That is the question.

Sitting here by the office window, with the smell of ink in one's nostrils, with the steady monotonous clatter of the linotypes in the ears, and the whirring of the shafting from the press-room in the basement throbbing through one's nerves, with the very material realisation of the office around one; we feel that only a small part of it, and of the life about it, has been set down in these sketches. Passing the office window every moment is someone with a story that should be told. Every human life, if one could know it well and translate it into language, has in it the making of a great story. It is because we are blind that we pass men and women around us, heedless of the tragic quality of their lives. If each man or woman could understand that every other human life is as full of sorrows, of joys, of base temptations, of heartaches and of remorse as his own, which he thinks so peculiarly isolated from the web of life, how much kinder, how much gentler he would be! And how much richer life would be for all of us! Life is dull to no one; but life seems dull to those dull persons who think life is dull for others, and who see only the drab

and grey shades in the woof that is woven about them.

Here in our town are ten thousand people, and yet these sketches have told of less than two score of them. In the town are thousands of others quite as interesting as these of whom we have written. A few minutes ago Jim Bolton rode by on his hack. There is no reason why others should be advertised of men and Jim left out; for Jim is the proudest man in town.

He came here when the town was young, and was president of the Anti-Horse-Thief League in the days before it became an emeritus institution, when it was a power in politics and named the Sheriff as a matter of right and of course. Jim has never let the fact that he kept a livery-stable and drove a hack interfere with his position as leading citizen. He keeps a livery-stable, because that is his business, and he drives a hack because he cannot trust such a valuable piece of property in the hands of the boy. But when the street fair is to be put on, or the base-ball team financed, or when the Baptist Church needs a new roof, or the petitions are to be cir-

culated for a bond election, Jim Bolton gets down from his hack, puts on his crystal slipper and is the Cinderella of the occasion. That is why, when young men go in Jim's hack to take young women to parties and dances, they always invite Jim in to sit by the fire and get warm while the girls are primping. That is why, when young Ben Mercer, just home from five years at Harvard, offered Jim a "tip" over the usual twenty-five-cent fare, Jim quietly took off his coat and whipped young Ben where he stood—and the town lined up for an hour, each man eager for the privilege of contributing ten cents to the popular subscription to pay old Jim's fine and costs in police-court.

Following Jim Bolton on his hack past the office window came Bill Harrison, once extra brakeman on the Dry Creek Branch, just promoted to be conductor on the main line, and so full of vainglory in his exalted position that he wears his brass buttons on freight trains. Bill's wife signs his pay-check and doles out his cigar money, a quarter at a time, and when he asks for a dollar, she looks at him as if she suspected him of leading a double life. It is her

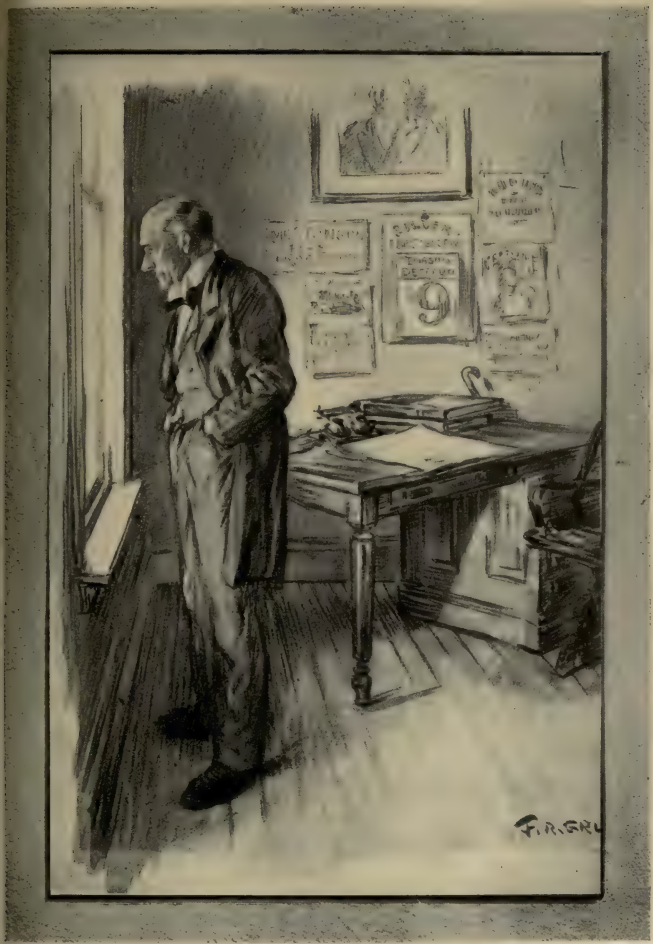
ambition to live in Topeka, for "there are so many conductors in Topeka," she says, "that society is not so mixed"—as it is in our town, where she complains that the switchmen and the firemen and the student-brakemen dominate society. Once a cigar salesman from Kansas City got on Bill's train and offered a lead dollar for fare.

"I can't take this," protested Bill, emphasising the "I," because his job was new.

"Well, then, you might just turn that one over to the company," responded the drummer.

And when the head-brakeman told it in the yards, Bill had to fuss with his wife for two days to get money for a box of cigars to stop the trouble.

As these lines were being written, Miss Littleton came into the office with a notice for the Missionary Society. She has been teaching school in town for thirty years and is not so cheerful as she was once. For a long time the board has considered dismissing her; but it continues to change her around from building to building and from room to room, and to keep her out of sheer pity; and she knows it. There



Counting the liars and scoundrels and double-dealers and villains who pass

is tragedy enough in her story to fill a book. Yet she looks as humdrum as you please, and smiles so gaily as she puts down her notice, that one thinks perhaps she is trying to dispel the impression that she is cross and impatient with children.

On the other side of the street, upstairs in his dusty real estate office, with tin placards of insurance companies on the wall, and gaudy calendars tacked everywhere, Silas Buckner stands at the window counting the liars and scoundrels, and double-dealers and villains, and thieves and swindlers who pass. Since Silas was defeated for Register of Deeds he has become a pessimist. He has soured on the town, and when he sees a man, Silas thinks only of the evil that man has done. Silas knows all men's weaknesses, forgets their strength, and looking down from the window hates his fellow-creatures for the wrong they have done him, or the wickedness that he knows of them. He has never given our reporters a kindly item of news since he was turned down, but if there is a discreditable story on any citizen going around we hear it first from Silas, and if we do

not print it he says we have taken hush money. If we have to print it, he says we are stirring up strife. Seeing him over there, looking down on the town which to him is accursed, we have often thought how weary God must be looking at the world and knowing so much better than Silas the weakness and iniquity of men. Sometimes we have wondered if sin is really as important as Silas thinks it is, for with Silas sin is a blot that effaces a man's soul. But maybe God sees sin only as a blemish that men may overcome. Perhaps God is not so discouraged with us as Silas is. But life is a puzzle at most.

Last night Aaron Marlin died. He had lived for ninety years in this world, and had seen much and suffered much, and has died as a child turns to sleep. It was quiet and still at his home among the elms as he lay in his coffin. The mourners spoke in low and solemn tones, and the blinds were drawn as if death were shy. As he lay there in the great hush that was over the house, there passed before it on the sidewalk two who spoke as low as the mourners, though they were oblivious to the house of death. They trod slowly, and a great calm was

on their souls. One of the scribes who sets down these lines stood in the shadow of the doorway pine-tree and saw the lovers passing; he felt the silence and the sorrow behind the door he was about to enter; and there he stood wondering—between Death and Love—the End and the Beginning of God's great mystery of Life. Now, with the sense of that great mystery upon him, with all of this pied skein of life about him, he puts down his pen, and looks out of the window as the thread winds down the street.

For " Thirty " is in for the day.

THE END

PS
3545
H617I6
1906

White, William Allen
In our town

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